Maternal Perceptions of 'Parental Determinism', Media Representations of Parenting and How These Relate to Understandings of Their Wellbeing

Hilllary Kate Emily Bradley Collins

BA (Hons), BSc (Hons), MSc

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit

College of Social Sciences

University of Glasgow

October 2022

Abstract

Aim: To examine how 'parental determinism' is understood by mothers, the role of the media in shaping these understandings, and how mothers perceive these understandings to impact on their wellbeing.

Background: Two main theories underlay this study. First, 'parental determinism', coined by Frank Furedi, is the concept that children's outcomes are largely shaped by parenting practices, which ultimately shape society (Lee, 2014a). Second, Clive Seale's (2003) argument that people use cultural scripts presented in the media to construct the self. Literature in parenting culture studies suggests intense social and political interest in parenting, which may be stressful for mothers. Scoping reviews of the literature found studies showing media representations of parental determinism, and that endorsement of 'intensive mothering' ideologies were associated with poorer maternal wellbeing (Rizzo et al, 2013). Research questions were formed with the intention of investigating possible links between these elements of key background literature.

Research Questions: Three key research questions: 1) What are mothers' understandings of parental determinism and to what extent do they endorse a causal association between their actions and their children's outcomes? 2) What do mothers think are the key sources of their beliefs and attitudes on parenting and what impact do mothers think broadcast and social media representations of parenting have on their parenting identities and behaviours? 3) What impact do mothers think their parenting identities and behaviours and the media have on their wellbeing? There were also two intermediary questions related to RQ2: 2a) What are the main media channels mothers consider they are exposed to? 2b) How do mothers perceive broadcast and social media to represent parenting?

Methods: Two main stages of data collection, each preceded by a contextualising stage. The main stages of data collection were: 1) interviews with 23 mothers (aged 20-49 years, living in SIMD areas 1-10, 14 with university degrees, 16 white Scottish, 3 South Asian (born outside Scotland), most (n20) with children aged 3 months- 5 years, 3 mothers of children with Autism); and 2) follow up interviews with eleven previously interviewed mothers. Preceding the first main stage of data collection was a contextualising analysis of content of 47 threads from an online parenting forum (data collection stage 1a); and before the second main stage, a contextualising analysis of content of 49 BBC News items (data collection stage 2a). This order of data collection stages allowed not just for cumulative

insights but also ‘zooming in’ on specific issues. All data were analysed thematically following (with adjustments) Braun and Clarke’s (2006) method.

Results: RQ1: There was no complete rebuttal of the causality aspect of parental determinism, though there were varying levels of endorsement of it. Some mothers cited other important factors contributing to children’s outcomes, and others argued that parental actions are the single most important factor determining children’s outcomes. There was higher endorsement of parental determinism among mothers who had experienced poor parenting, and lower endorsement among mothers of children with Autism. RQ2: Reported influences on parenting ranged across the paradigms of expert guided and tacit knowledge and included childhood experiences, instincts, parenting groups, and the media. There were some examples cited by interviewees of behaviours changed because of a media message. Some mothers argued that they may be subject to unconscious influence, and there was also an argument that though they themselves may not be influenced by the media, others (due to lack of education or experience) might be. RQ2a: All of the interviewed mothers used social media of some sort, most Facebook. There were few overlaps in traditional media channels cited, with the exceptions of two sitcoms and the BBC as a news source. Mothers on the online forum frequently referenced the Daily Mail, possibly to prompt debate. RQ2b: Hall (1997) distinguished between studies of media representation concerned with being realistic, and those concerned with media as constituent of reality. Mothers in interviews identified two sitcoms as realistic; both feature themes which could be linked to notions of parental determinism and intensive mothering. Mothers identified sources of power that shaped media representations, in ways aligned to Hall’s consideration of representation as constituent of reality. RQ3: Feelings of worry and guilt were reported following reflection on their own parenting practices linked to ‘parental determinism’ and 'intensive mothering'. The media played a complex role in mothers' social lives, as representation and infrastructure, and had positive and negative impacts on their wellbeing.

Implications for Policy and Practice: A discursive shift away from dismissal of media studies towards bringing media literacy into general secondary education may better equip people to critique media messages and avoid harm from negative or unhelpful messages. Health professionals face a tension between providing mother-centred care and professional obligations to unequivocally promote breastfeeding. If major health and care organisations presented a more ambivalent view of breastfeeding, it would enable health professionals to offer more mother-centred care.

Contents

List of Tables and Figures

Author’s Declaration

Acknowledgements

I would firstly like to thank the participants in this study, which was dependent on their generosity of time and thought. Ann Oakley, quoting Limerick and colleagues, argued that "researchers need to accept as a gift 'of time, of text and of understanding' material provided by the researched, because the product of the research is 'our story of their story' (Limerick et al., 1996 pages 458 and 450, cited Oakley, 2016, page 208)". I am truly grateful for the opportunity to have worked with such material.

Thank you to my supervisors, Professor Daniel Wight and Professor Shona Hilton, for their boundless generosity of expertise and energy. They have seen the worst of this thesis, but hopefully enjoyed the better parts of it. I am grateful to the Medical Research Council for funding this PhD. I have been helped along the way by numerous members of staff and students at the MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit and want to particularly thank the professional services staff, who keep the whole place going. Thank you to Dr Ruth Lewis who pointed me in the direction of some really helpful research. Also, a massive thank you to Dr Carrie Purcell who read through this thesis and provided wonderful comments and suggestions.

Dr Linda Quirke facilitated a visit to Wilfrid Laurier University which involved an opportunity to present some early findings to social science students and a meeting (and dinner!) with her and Dr Glenda Wall, all of whom shared brilliant insights. Thank you for being so kind to a student who essentially cold-called you.

On a more personal note, I want to thank my mother, who has always been very supportive, and who I thought of many times while writing this thesis. I give absolutely no thanks whatsoever to Elizabeth and Bobby who were nothing but a distraction while I was trying to write.

[1]

Chapter One- Introduction

1.1 Structure of this thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters. In this first introductory chapter, I outline some key concepts and terms in parenting culture studies. This is followed by the literature review chapter (Chapter Two) which comprises two scoping reviews of empirical literature and one review of more theoretic literature. Together these reviews indicated that media representations of parenting were frequently found to be aligned to 'parental determinism' and related concepts; that media influence may be linked to identities; and that maternal wellbeing was impacted by endorsement of particular parenting ideologies, perceptions of competence, maternal age, education level, social support and their child having conditions affecting their behaviour. In Chapter Three, the methods used for data collection and analysis are detailed. Two main methods, or stages, were used: initial interviews with 23 mothers and follow up interviews with eleven of these previously interviewed mothers. These stages were each preceded by a contextual stage of data collection: analysis of an online parenting forum and analysis of a media channel cited by participants (48 BBC News items), respectively. In the first of the findings chapters (Chapter Four), participants' understandings of parental determinism are detailed, with a focus on mothers' varying endorsement of the causality element of it. Mothers who reported poor experiences of being parented tended to indicate higher endorsement of parental determinism. Chapter Five, the second findings chapter, outlines key sources of parenting influence cited by mothers. There is a later focus in this chapter on the influence of the media. The subject of

the final findings chapter (Chapter Six) is maternal wellbeing. First, there is examination of participants' perceptions of the impact of their parenting beliefs and practices on their wellbeing, followed by examination of participants' perceptions of media impact on their wellbeing. The thesis is concluded in Chapter Seven with a hypothesised link between findings, suggestions for policy, practice and future research, reflections on possible impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic on considerations of the findings, and a summary of the findings and contribution to the literature.

1.2 Key concepts and terms in Parenting Culture Studies

This section provides an overview of shifting perceptions of parenting and explains some terms key to the topic area, including 'parental determinism', 'intensive mothering', 'paranoid parenting' and 'total motherhood'. This section aims to provide the rationale for my research on this topic.

Parenting styles, including differences in parental warmth, control and monitoring have been found to be associated with differing outcomes in adolescents (Hoskins, 2014). There is also evidence that early childhood can impact later wellbeing: "[a] large body of evidence shows that adult illnesses are more prevalent and problematic among those who have experienced adverse early life conditions" (Campbell et al., 2014, page 1478). Nores and Barnett's (2009, page 271) evidence review of early childhood interventions found "children from different context and countries receive substantial cognitive, behavioral, health and schooling benefits from early childhood interventions". This weight of evidence towards the importance of early childhood experiences and parenting and the effectiveness of childhood interventions, provides a strong rationale for government policy focussed on parenting as well as political agenda setting and framing of parenting in the media.

Alongside this, there has been commentary from sociologists who noted a shift in cultural conceptualisation and linguistics surrounding parenting. Faircloth (2010b, page 359) points out that the term 'parent' has for some, moved from being a noun to being a verb; that parent is something people do, rather than (or perhaps as well as) are. Furedi (2002, page 197 cited Lee 2014, page 7) concurs with this observation, stating that although previously 'to parent' "referred exclusively to the act of begetting a child" it now includes the behaviour of parents. Furedi (2002, page 106 cited Lee 2014, page 7) adds some historical context to this with his argument that "[t]he belief that children require special care and attention evolved alongside the conviction that what adults did mattered to their

development. These sentiments gained strength… in the nineteenth century". Parenting, Furedi (2014, page ix) argues, is now seen as "a cultural accomplishment that can be cultivated to produce positive outcomes".

Central to Furedi's argument about the shifting perception of children and childrearing is the notion of 'infant determinism', where infant experiences are considered to pivotally shape the adult and older child they turn in to (Furedi, 2001). This is linked to the term 'parental determinism' coined by Furedi in the early 2000s, which is the idea that the everyday actions and behaviours of parents causally shape the future wellbeing of their children and, therefore, of society (Lee, 2014a, page 3). Connected to this is consideration of children (young children in particular) as both malleable and vulnerable (Furedi, 2001); that children are highly impressionable in ways which can be harmful but also that individual children can be improved, optimised or made more successful, often in relation to cognitive ability, by parental action (Macvarish, 2014a).

Hays focussed on mothers, rather than fathers or parents more generally, as the party targeted by deterministic thinking of this kind (Faircloth, 2014). Hays described a parenting culture where "the methods of appropriate child rearing are construed as child centred, expert guided, emotionally absorbing, labor intensive, and financially expensive" and refers to this ethic as 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996, page 9, cited Faircloth, 2014, page 27). Also focussing on mothers, but mainly in relation to infant feeding, Wolf used the term 'total motherhood' to summarise an ideology where mothers are subjugated in an expectation that they must remove any possible risk of harm to their children even at any possible cost to themselves (Wolf, 2013).

In Lee and colleague's (2014) *Parenting Culture Studies*, Macvarish wrote on government parenting policy. Macvarish (2014b) focussed on the late 1990s as a time of change towards intense political attention in the UK on shaping the behaviour of parents with reference to the significance of early childhood. However, Macvarish acknowledged that children and the family have been the subject of policy and political debate for some time before that. In the history Macvarish (2014b) presented, several of the policies introduced by the Labour Party when they came to power in 1997 (including Sure Start and Family Nurse Partnership programmes) were influenced by US research and policy from the 1960s. Macvarish (2014b, page 100) argued that "'[c]yclical explanations for intergenerational transfer of poverty have developed [from governments of the 1990s through successive administrations] into an even more reductionist 'parental determinism'.

The infant brain has most recently become a focal point for early intervention policies, providing a 'now or never' imperative to train parents in evidence-based parenting". A recent exemplar of this political endorsement can be seen in the UK Government's *Early Years Healthy Development Review Report*, subtitled *A Vision for the 1,001 Critical Days*, in which the chair's opening remark is:

> Two is too late! We spend billions on challenges in society from lack of school readiness to bullying to poor mental health to addictions and criminality; and further billions on conditions such as obesity, diabetes, and congenital heart disease. Yet, the building blocks for lifelong emotional and physical health are laid down in the period from conception to the age of two and we don't give this critical period the focus it deserves.
>
> Leadsom, 2021, page 5

A central theme in *Parenting Culture Studies* is that responsibility for children and their outcomes is increasingly individualised (becoming solely to do with individual parental action, as opposed to, for example, addressing inequalities in housing or education), which is aligned to the neoliberal (small state, libertarian) ideologies of UK governments from the latter part of the Twentieth Century onwards.

Though Lee et al. (2014) are critical of much UK government parenting policy, Bristow (2014, page 102) argues that their analysis of parenting culture does not support the idea that "'parenting' should be viewed as a task that should simply be left to parents". She goes on to cite Furedi's (2008a, page 171, cited Bristow, 2014, page 102) assertion that "[p]arents do need support [including childcare], [but m]ost important of all, they need to know that the decisions they make about the future of their children will be supported and not undermined by the rest of society". This type of parental fear of social criticism is bound up in Furedi's notion of 'paranoid parenting' a context where:

> The constant labelling of parenting as some kind of 'problem' undermines the confidence of mothers and fathers. Although the target audience of politicians is a minority of so-called dysfunctional parents, the depressing message our leaders communicate about the problems of childrearing has a disorienting impact on everybody. Consequently, the numerous helpful initiatives designed to 'support' parents do anything but reassure us – they simply encourage the public to become even more paranoid about parenting. The second regrettable outcome of the politicisation of childrearing is that it has intensified our sense of insecurity and anxiety about virtually every aspect of children's lives and experiences
>
> Furedi, 2008b

Bristow (2014, page 102) summarises discussion of parent training in *Parenting Culture Studies* with an argument that such programmes do not "improve… life for parents".

However, this speculation is presented without reference to empirical data. Although the evidence base for early childhood interventions and the significance of parenting on children's outcomes is strong, what is not so clear is the effect such deterministic conceptualisations around parenting have on parents themselves, or society more broadly. My intention with this PhD study was to provide more empirical data about mothers' perceptions of social framings of parenting.

[2]

Chapter Two- Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is in four parts. It starts with two systematic scoping literature reviews, the first on research analysing media representations of parenting and the second on research into social factors related to maternal wellbeing. These are followed by a review of literature about media influence, and finally, the establishment of research aims and questions for the project.

Literature review chapters are often structured by theme, combining literature found via different searches. However, due to the subject matter of this project, delineated reporting of separate searches may be clearer. The project arches over three main, quite distinct disciplinary areas: parenting culture studies, media studies, and the sociology of health and illness. The foundation of the project, as detailed in Chapter One, is parenting culture studies. Questions could be seen to arise from this literature about the role of the media in parenting culture, and about the impact such cultures might have on maternal wellbeing. This chapter has been structured to hopefully address these questions. The reviews are presented in the order in which I conducted them. This elucidates how my thinking developed over the literature reviewing process, and how this eventually shaped the research questions for the overall project.

The starting point for the first scoping review was the initial, later amended, project title: *Maternal Perceptions of Media Representations of the 'Science of Parenting', and the Impact of These on Their Wellbeing*. As a first stage, I wanted to scope existing research of media representations of parenting, and how these representations related to theoretical

literature within parenting culture studies. This search was carried out early in the project and it was partly through this search, as well as contextual reading of theoretical literature related to parenting culture studies, that the overall project title was changed to focus on maternal understandings of 'parental determinism'. The review (Section 2.2), though using generic terms related to parenting, found media representations to be variously aligned to parental deterministic thinking. This led me to consider the possible implications for maternal wellbeing of these media representations. This might be colloquially called a 'so what?' reflection on the results of the first review. The subsequent review (Section 2.3) did not focus solely on the impacts on wellbeing of media representations but social factors, more broadly, which affect maternal wellbeing. The review did not find any research relating to media representations and maternal wellbeing. However, based on some of the research identified and some theoretical literature, I speculated a link between the media, the formation of cultural scripts, and impacts to wellbeing from discordance with these cultural scripts. This theoretical speculation leads on to examination of a mix of theoretical and empirical literature around media influence (Section 2.4). The final section (2.5) of this chapter starts with reflections on this literature base and speculation as to how new research in this project may add to and complement it. These reflections coalesce in the formulation of an aim for this project and research questions to be addressed.

2.2 Literature Review- Media Representations of Parenting

2.2.1 Aim and Scope

The aim of the first review was to map and summarise existing research on media representations related to the practice of parenting, following Armstrong et al's (2011) guidance on scoping reviews.

2.2.2 Methods

The academic journal databases searched were: *Applied Social Sciences Index & Abstracts* (*ASSIA*), *SocINDEX with Full Text, Anthropology Plus, Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature* (*CINAHL*) and *Sociological Abstracts*. The search terms used varied slightly due to search engine logistics but can be approximately summarised using Boolean operators and database notation as "(ab)parent* OR (ab)mother* OR (ab)father* AND (ab)media OR (ab)television OR (ab)newspaper OR (ab)magazine". Searches were carried out in October and November 2016.

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Subject: Must be about media representations of parenting. Method: Must be empirical research. To determine whether papers found could be considered research, I used Sullivan's (2009, page 448) definition: "[research is t]he product and the action of methodological inquiry. Scientific research consists of investigations rooted in theory, logic, and empiricism … Scholarly and scientific research is careful, structured inquiry that adheres to the constraints, requisites, and terms that discipline and researchers have developed and come to collectively accept". Time frame: No publication date limit was set	Subject: Studies were excluded that were about interventions related to the media (for example evaluating parenting training delivered using television programmes) or about broader media influence (for example looking at the impact of watching violent films on behaviour). Focus: Studies of representations of parenting were excluded if the study was of content produced, unmediated, by parents themselves, including using social media or online forums. Exceptions to this were instances where the parent generated content was mediated by a media source, for example in studies of parents' letters published in magazines. Method: Studies were excluded if the primary research method was not focussed directly on media source content. Language: Non-English language studies were excluded due to my own linguistic limitations

Table 2.1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

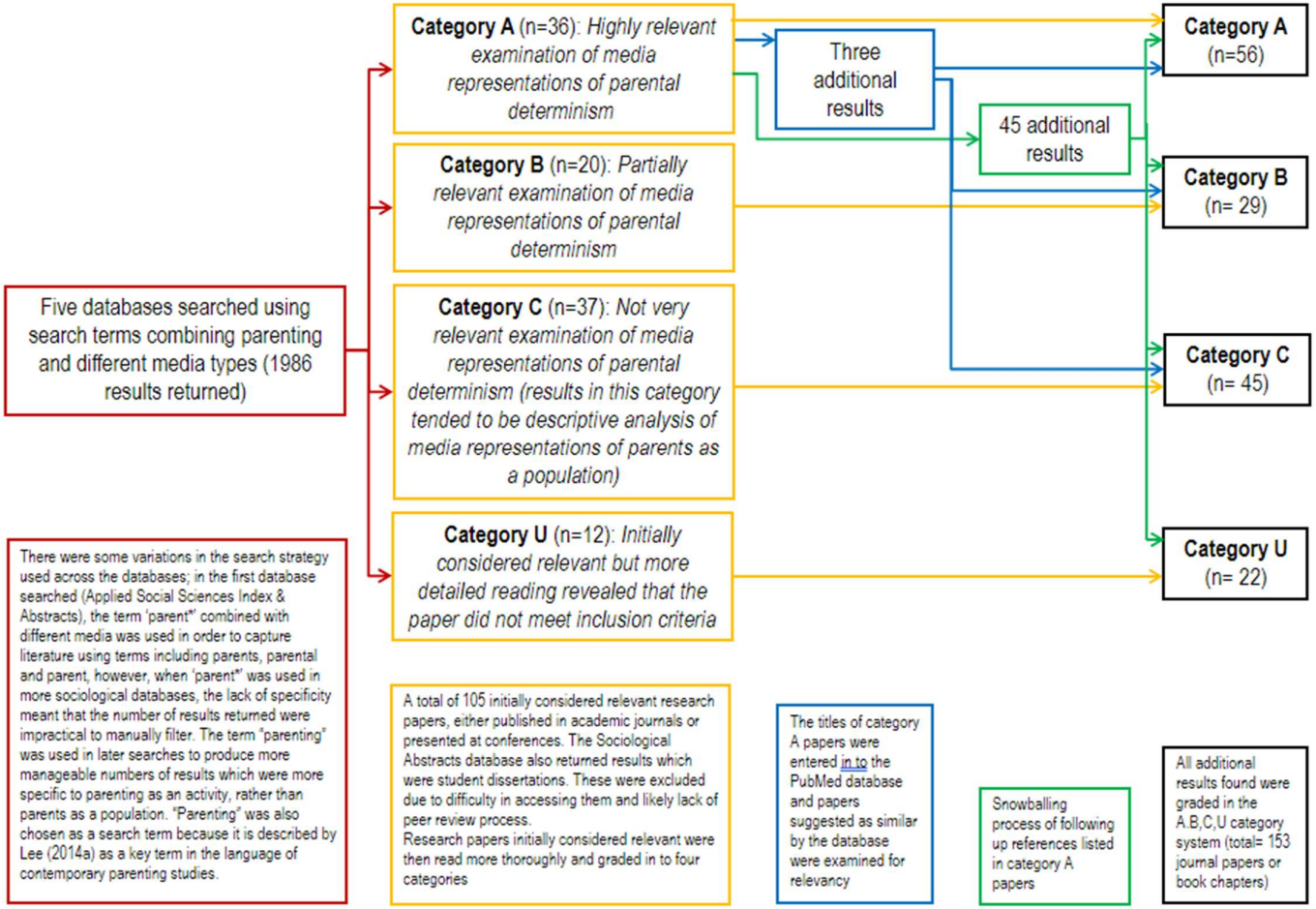


Figure 2.1: Search process

Each paper was tabulated summarising results, methods used, type of analysis applied, and media type analysed. The papers were then graded in to one of four categories (A, B, C or U), depending on the relevance of the paper (see Figure 2.2 for descriptions of categories). The summary of results and discussion sections of papers were then analysed and organised thematically, using NVivo version 11 (qualitative data management software).

2.2.3 Results

Of the papers graded A-B (85 studies), 26 examined newspapers, 26 examined parenting or pregnancy magazines, 20 general interest magazines, 12 television content, and 8 parenting books or manuals. Several studies examined more than one media type and 5 examined other media (parenting or health advice literature from healthcare or policy sources (4) and websites (1)).

Most (49) of the A-B category papers either focussed on, or included in their analysis, media from the USA, 21 included UK media, 16 Canadian media, 6 Australian media and 8 studied media from other countries (2 from New Zealand, 2 from Japan, and there was one instance each of studies of media from Sweden, Romania, Indonesia and Finland). It is acknowledged that excluding non-English language results probably shaped this distribution.

Over half (48) of the A and B papers applied a form of content analysis on the media examined and 28 used a form of discourse analysis. Other analytic methods applied included "Bacchi's method of problem representation" and "social constructionist thematic analysis" (Bastian, 2011, page 135; Budds et al., 2013, page 136).

Conceptual themes I developed from examination of category A and B studies were as follows:

- *Framing:* of groups of people, either by themselves in some form of "identity work", or by others

- *Skills*: Discussion of skills involved in parenting, which can be taught and advised upon
- *Experts*: Discussion of experts in parenting, who have knowledge and understanding of these skills, and are an authority of how parenting should be done

- *Risk:* Examination of representations of children and society being at risk of harm, and how that harm can be mitigated

- *Potentiality:* Discussion that children's outcomes can be optimised in some way though specific actions

- *Responsibility:* that parents are duty bound to behave or interact with their children in particular ways and have the capacity to do so
- Governmentality: That there are forces of governmentality, surveillance and political ideology which are related to parental agency in parent-child relationships

In the interests of brevity only points of particular importance to subsequent discussions in this thesis are drawn out and presented.

2.2.4 Discussion

This review found many examples in which the media content featured representations of parenting which were aligned to theories of 'parental determinism' (and related concepts including 'intensive mothering' and 'total motherhood'), though also some which were opposed.

In the *framing* theme, Kehily's (2010) finding that a variety of media types presented an idea of a "crisis of childhood" and Bristow (2013) and Jordan's (1995) conclusions about a lack or a loss of adult authority could be seen to support arguments about changing relative social positions of adults and children. Zivkovic et al. (2010), Anderson et al. (2002), Clarke (2001), Gross and Pattison (2001), Miller et al. (2014) and Wall and Arnold (2007) all concluded that it is mothers, rather than fathers who are typically framed as having parental responsibility. This is very much aligned to Hays (1996) and Wolf's (2013) theories and confirmed initial thinking that the focus of my research should be mothers' perceptions of these representations and associated impacts on their wellbeing. Robson (2005), Wall (2013) and Locke's (2015) finding that good motherhood is framed by ideas of sacrifice resonate with the ethic of total motherhood theorised by Wolf and intensive mothering by Hays. Women and children were found to be framed in complex and intersecting ways, including in discussion of children's agency or lack thereof (Kelly, 1996; Budds et al, 2013; Lowe et al, 2010; Connolly-Ahern and Broadway, 2008; Booth, 2000; Zivkovic et al, 2010; Wall, 2013; Rutherford, 2009; Locke, 2015; Tally, 2008; Smith et al, 1998) and in terms of blame apportioned to women or mothers (Anderson et al, 2001; Budds et al, 2013; Campbell and Levesque, 1998; De Laat and Baumann, 2016; Marshall, 1991).

In several studies, there was discussion of the impact of the 'psy professions' on parenting culture (Clarke, 2014; Clarke et al., 2016; Robson, 2005; Hoffman, 2009; Bundy et al., 1997; Kuhn-Wilkin et al. 2012) which aligned to Lee (2014b) and Hays' (1996) argument that Freud, Piaget and other early to mid-twentieth century psychologists have been a major influence on popular notions of child rearing and advice.

A finding in these studies which particularly validated the concept of parental determinism was the prevalence and variety of ways in which parents were represented as either vitally responsible for protecting children from harm or as the potential cause of it. Parents were represented as potentially harming their children if they were gay (Clarke, 2001; Clarke and Kitzinger, 2005), drank alcohol during pregnancy (Connolly-Ahern and Broadway, 2008; Lowe et al, 2010), did not exercise correctly during pregnancy (Jette, 2006), did not make the correct choices to prevent their children becoming obese (Kendrik, 2008; Mainland et al, 2015; Zivkovic et al 2010; Kalin and Fung, 2013) or did not choose the right day-care for their children (Wall, 2013). There was also discussion of representations of parental blame for societal ills, in relation to the UK riots of 2011 (Bristow, 2013; Nijjar, 2015) and childhood criminality more broadly (White, 2010). Central to the *potentiality* theme was the finding that as well as representations of the harms parents must prevent, there was also encouragement for parents to do certain things to optimise or improve their children's outcomes, with particular regard to neurodevelopment (O'Connor and Joffe, 2013; Quirke, 2014). This can again be linked to Hays' (1996) notion of intensive mothering.

Another way in which the research findings backed up theoretical writing on parental determinism was a common finding that parenting was represented as increasingly individualised and aligned to neoliberal ideals of self-management and minimal state involvement (Kuhn-Wilkin et al, 2012; Nijjar, 2015; Miller et al, 2014; Jette, 2006; Wall, 2001).

Instances where research seemed to indicate a more complex relationship with theories surrounding parental determinism came mainly in discussion of parenting 'experts'. Lee (2014b, page 53) argued that "from the late nineteenth century onwards, there is a distinct turn towards calling in to question 'folk' knowledge, this tendency co-exists until fairly recently with some validation of 'instinct' as a guide which is as good as any other". However, Warner found in a content analysis of *Parents* magazine across several decades that:

> In most years, lay experts are more highly represented than professional experts. In 1987 and 2007, it is specifically mothers who are the most dominant expert type in articles about parenting. The central role of lay experts in the current analysis suggests that previous studies have overstated the degree to which parenting advice is guided by scientifically trained experts, at least in the case of parenting magazines
>
> Warner, 2009, page 1

While Warner suggested that it is not, say, child psychologists, but lay people, particularly mothers, represented as experts, there was seemingly still a perception that parenting should be guided by external forces, not individual instinct. This brings in an interesting consideration of authority, and who is presented as having it. There have been observations of the increasing professionalisation of parenting advice, but perhaps there is also scope for suggestion that parents gain legitimacy as experts by virtue of being parents and recounting personal experience. Perhaps with increasing use of social media and the internet, it could be argued that parents are increasingly encountering advice from other parents, rather than scientific experts. It was not in the scope of this review to examine that, though this did lead to areas of questioning and analysis in primary fieldwork. Clarke's (2014) analysis of the magazine *Chatelaine* in two time periods (1928-44 and 1990-2012) found that parenting advice went from being routine based and informed by science as an objective authority in the first period, to being concerned with children as individuals and advice coming from a range of sources. On one hand, this can be interpreted as opposing Lee's argument for a delegitimising of folk knowledge, though on the other hand, possibly it is representative of increasing interest in, and individualisation of parenting. Following analysis of *L.A. Parent* magazine and the television programme *A Case for Louise* Assarsson and Aarsand (2011, page 78) assert that "[t]he role of parenting experts is to position parents as responsible adults with the ability to make desired changes happen". This indicates a perception of parents as wholly competent. Similarly, Clarke's (2010, page 170) analysis of *Today's Parent* magazine concluded that "mothers are responsible, healthy, energetic, and capable managers and experts who are able to work and advocate for their children's health; and mothers are able to critically assess doctors and medical care" again foregrounds parental competency.

These findings illustrate complex tensions in societal expectations of parents: that there is a correct way to parent to secure the future of society but also that parenting is individualised, every child is different, and the state does not necessarily have a role in parenting practice. Parenting is depicted as a private practice, vital to the public good.

Parallel to this is the tension of legitimacy between professional, scientific advice and the experiential expertise of individual parents, usually related, I would argue, to social power. Parents are simultaneously presented as capable decision makers while surrounded by cultural prompts suggesting ways they could (and quite possibly have) failed.

Overall, this review showed that prior research on media representation of parenting was predominantly focussed on North America, the UK and Australia. Print media (specifically magazines) were most commonly analysed, which may be due to perceived convenience or rigor in the methods available for analysis, rather than because these media have been shown to be particularly influential. This observation led to plans in this project to focus on media sources which mothers state are important to them.

2.3 Literature Search- Social Factors Associated with Maternal Wellbeing in High Income Settings

After examining the literature on how parenting is represented in the media, a logical next area of investigation was to examine the potential effects, on mothers, these representations might have, particularly with regards to their wellbeing. Bristow (2014, page 102) speculated that parenting training does not improve life for parents. An extrapolation from this is indication of an impact to parental wellbeing from interventions aligned to parental determinism. This speculation led to my questioning which social factors, especially those related to parenting, might be linked to changes in maternal wellbeing.

2.3.1 Aim and Scope

This review aimed to scope previous research on factors associated with maternal wellbeing. To focus on areas similar to Scotland, the setting for this PhD, and retain relevance to the overarching PhD study area, this review was limited to research on social factors (rather than medical interventions) and set in high-income countries, or autonomous regions (as defined by the World Bank (2017)). This review aimed to gain insight into the *range* of existing research and therefore factors associated with differing maternal health and the ways in which maternal health was considered. The aims of this review also fitted Armstrong et al.'s (2011) description of a scoping review.

The reviewed studies applied a variety of methods in line with a range of epistemological approaches. This included longitudinal, cross-sectional, qualitative and review studies. This range meant it was not possible to assert causality in all the studies or use terms like

predictors to refer to circumstances found to relate to maternal health. Instead of causality, this review uses the broader concept of association and instead of predictors, the term factor is used.

2.3.2 Methods

The *Applied Social Sciences Index & Abstracts (ASSIA)* and *Sociological Abstracts* :databases were searched for the following terms appearing in the abstract of the paper ;(social maternal health); (social maternal wellbeing); (factors maternal wellbeing) maternal AND (happiness)OR satisfaction)). This produced 1880 results, of which 187 were initially considered relevant following title and abstract screening. The 187 research papers were categorised as very relevant, moderately relevant or not sufficiently relevant to be considered further. 140 papers were decided to be very or moderately relevant.

Very or moderately relevant studies were subject to a data extraction process which involved noting the maternal health outcome being measured and the factors found to be associated with better or worse maternal health.

The most common maternal wellbeing outcome was depression or depressive symptoms, followed by general or other mental (ill)health, satisfaction (mainly in life, marriage, or parenting), stress, anxiety, miscellaneous wellbeing, physical health, health behaviours and strain, fatigue or sleep. The factors found to be negatively or positively associated with one or more of these aspects of maternal wellbeing were grouped into categories, which were further grouped according to a social ecological model typology inspired by Bronfenbrenner's social ecology of human development (Trudge, 2013) and the Dahlgren-Whitehead rainbow model (ESRC, 2015).

Social Ecological Model Category	Factor Type
Individual	Maternal conditions or history; Child characteristics; Race or nationality or language; Maternal age; Maternal education; Pregnancy intentions or maternal role; Coping style; Competence; Satisfaction; Stress or Fatigue
Interpersonal	Partner; Parenting style or activities or relationship; Breastfeeding
Organisational	Care or childcare; Employment; Neighbourhood or environment or housing
Community	Social or network support; Racism
Policy	Immigration; Legal context; Economic

Table 2.2: Factors positioned in a social ecological model

2.3.3 Results

Over half (73) of the very or moderately relevant papers (140) studied maternal health in the USA. Other countries or areas where maternal health was studied included Australia (11), the United Kingdom (11), Canada (9), Hong Kong (7), Japan (5), Sweden (5), Norway (3), Germany (2), Israel (2), Italy (2), South Korea (2), Taiwan (2) as well as Belgium, Finland, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Pacific Islands (one study each). The high number of studies from the USA, UK, Australia and Canada may be partially explained by the search being limited to English language studies.

There were several hundred associations found between factors and maternal wellbeing, with some common findings. One of the most common findings was that having a child with behaviour described as difficult, disruptive or a problem was associated with worse maternal wellbeing (Lee, 2013; Barker et al., 2011; Gray et al., 2011; Lloyd and Hastings, 2009; Stoneman, 2007; Woodman and Hauser-Cram, 2013; Hiebert-Murphy, 2000; Shivers et al., 2016; Allmann et al., 2016; Baker et al., 2012).

Young maternal age (variously defined as being teenage, under 21 years and in one study as under 25 years) was found to be associated with depression (Bayrampour et al., 2015; Wahn and Nissen, 2008), anxiety (Bayrampour et al., 2015; Martini et al., 2015), worse

general or other mental health (Aitken et al., 2016; Lynn et al., 2011; McNeil et al., 1984; Wahn and Nissen, 2008; Kearns et al., 1997), and worse non-specific wellbeing (Koropeckyj-Cox et al., 2007). However, being older than 28 was associated with less satisfaction in Swedish mothers in Kiehl and White's (2003) research, and some studies found associations between older maternal age and depression (Molina and Kiely, 2011; Taylor et al., 2013).

Mothers who had reached higher educational attainment were found to have lower levels of depression, parenting stress, psychological distress, psychological and somatic symptoms and more self-esteem (Holmes et al., 2012; Sheppard, 1997; Spinelli et al., 2013; Koeske and Koeske, 1990; Thompson and Peebles-Wilkins, 1992).

Several studies found a positive association between having a partner/ being married and maternal wellbeing (Laghi et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2012; Langlais et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2013; Aitken et al., 2016) and several found a negative association between being single/ leaving a relationship/ being unmarried and maternal health (Meier et al., 2016; Stevenson-Hinde et al., 2007; Osborne et al., 2012; Holmes et al., 2012; Kamp Dush, 2013; Koropeckyj-Cox et al., 2007), other studies found that the nature of the relationship has an association with maternal health. Thorp et al. (2004) found dissatisfaction with partner support was associated with stress, Dennis and Ross (2006) found it associated with depression and Thompson et al. (1992) found that increased partner support was associated with less depression. Marital satisfaction was negatively associated with depression in Choi's (2016), Chung et al.'s (2004), Hock and Lutz's (1992) and Stevenson-Hinde et al.'s (2007) research. Conflict or tension with partner was found to be negatively associated with maternal wellbeing (Dennis and Ross, 2006; Bayrampour et al., 2015). Thorp et al (2004) found higher stress levels amongst mothers whose partners withdrew when they (the mothers) wanted to discuss an issue. Most specifically, Maehara et al. (2016, page 14) found that mothers had lower levels of maternal role satisfaction if there was a "lack of communication with their partner about parenting roles" and Don et al. (2013) found lower levels of depression in mothers who had concordance with their partner on parenting style.

Greater social or network support was associated with better general maternal wellbeing, better physical health, better general or other mental health, greater satisfaction, less stress, less depression, and less role strain (Fagan and Schor, 1993; Benson, 2012; Cheng and Pickler, 2009; Koeske and Koeske, 1990; Rini et al., 2008; Baor and Soskolne, 2012;

Cardoso et al., 2010; Ekas et al., 2010; Holmes et al., 2012; Lee, 2013; Lindsay et al., 1999; Benson, 2016; Chung et al., 2004; Gjesford et al., 2010; Molina and Kiely, 2011; Sheppard, 1997; Hiebert-Murphy, 2000; Ngai and Chan, 2011; Barnett et al., 2016; Taylor and Roberts, 1995; Goldberg et al., 1992). Lower levels of social or network support or conflict/ poorer relationships with social networks (or individuals within networks) was associated with worse general wellbeing, anxiety, depression and other mental health (Jennings et al, 2014; Bayrampour et al., 2015; Martini et al., 2015; Benson, 2016; Caldwell et al., 1998; Chung et al., 2004; Small et al., 2003; Luoma et al., 2015; McMahon et al., 2015; Seguin et al., 1999; Tsao et al., 2015; Levendosky and Graham-Bermann, 2001).

Of particular interest to the study of parental determinism and related theories was Romagnoli and Wall's (2012) Canadian research which outlined how intensive mothering ideals were promoted through state interventions aimed at low-income, young mothers. They found that such interventions "were experienced as a prescriptive and regulative force in participants' lives" (Romagnoli and Wall, 2012, page 273). Liss et al. (2012, page 621) developed and validated a quantitative tool for assessing endorsement of intensive parenting ideology which broke down the notion of intensive mothering in to five domains: "(1) women are inherently better at parenting than men (Essentialism), (2) parenting should be fulfilling (Fulfillment), (3) children should be cognitively stimulated by parents (Stimulation), (4) mothering is difficult (Challenging), and (5) parents should prioritize the needs of the child (Child-Centered)". Rizzo et al.'s (2013) research in the USA used this tool and found that endorsement of the Essentialism aspect of intensive mothering was associated with decreased life satisfaction and increased stress, endorsement of the Challenging aspect was associated with decreased life satisfaction and increased depression and stress. The Child-Centered aspect was associated with decreased life satisfaction.

2.3.4 Discussion

Although several studies found similar associations between various factors and maternal health, what is more difficult to decipher is how or why these factors have these associations. Why is young age associated with poorer maternal wellbeing? What is it about social support that means it is associated with better maternal wellbeing? Why is endorsement of certain aspects of intensive mothering associated with poorer wellbeing? Although carrying out this review was motivated by wanting to investigate the influence of

media representations on maternal health, no studies were found which directly examined this. In the absence of directly relevant studies, it was hoped that examination of the how or why, the mechanism, of the association between other factors and maternal health would have implications for understanding the possible impact of the media on maternal wellbeing.

Some researchers cited social or psychological theories with which to better understand and provide explanation for the complex relationship between factors and outcomes. Holmes et al's (2012, page 502) research was "guided by social cognitive theories of maternal wellbeing that link a mother's perceived ability to enact desired choices with her psychological wellbeing". They found depression associated with a low match between desired and actual occupation. In Kestler-Peleg et al.'s (2015) study, the authors examined self-determination theory and presented this as an explanation for the relationship between breastfeeding motivations and maternal wellbeing where autonomous breastfeeding motivations were associated with more positive affect and greater life satisfaction.

Self- efficacy or competence was found by several studies to be associated with better wellbeing. Benson (2016) found parenting self-efficacy to partially mediate the relationship between issues in social support and maternal depression and wellbeing. Holloway et al. (2006) found that mothers who felt efficacious in the maternal role had more life satisfaction and Foster et al. (2010) found higher care-giving self-efficacy to be associated with higher general wellbeing. In Chavis' (2016) research, perceived efficacy was associated with less anxiety. Tobing and Glenwick (2007) found that higher parenting sense of competence was associated with less psychological distress and Damato et al. (2009) found that a combination of low parenting distress and high efficacy were associated with more positive mood. It can be argued from these studies then that mothers' wellbeing is enhanced when they think they are good at being a mother. A sense of self-efficacy might partially offset the negative effects of some factors (social support) but there are other factors (distress) which may be interrelated and perhaps must be removed for self-efficacy to improve wellbeing. Arguably similar to self-efficacy (in that it is a factor combining maternal individual qualities with interpersonal evaluation), maternal optimism and hope were found to be factors with a positive association with maternal wellbeing (Bayrampour et al., 2015; Ekas et al., 2010; Lloyd and Hastings, 2009). There remain questions, though, as to *how* self-perceived competence or optimism seemingly enhances wellbeing and how mothers gain or feel deficient in competence, optimism and hope.

One of the key conceptual points of the *Lancet* commission on Culture and Health (Napier et al, 2014) was that notions of wellbeing are varied: "[p]erceptions of physical and psychological wellbeing differ substantially across and within societies" and social context is important in the conceptualisation and determination of wellbeing. Seale (2003, pages 513 and 514) outlined previous sociological work which examined experiences of health and illness "towards a more holistic understanding of the meanings of illness for those who experience it", before arguing that individuals construct the self and "stor[ies] of their selves" through reflexive use of "culturally available narratives, stories, scripts, discourses, systems of knowledge or … ideologies". To extrapolate from this then, it could be argued that mothers draw upon cultural scripts to form ideas of parenting styles, what relationships with their partners should be like, and what parenting competence entails. Much of the research uncovered in this review supports the idea that discordance with these cultural scripts about parenting and other relationships is associated with lower maternal wellbeing. However, this does not entirely account for the impact of macro social level factors like income, immigration and discrimination on maternal health or address associated issues of agency and inequality.

No research was found in this review looking at the impact of the media on maternal health. In theoretical literature not found as part of this review, Seale (2003, page 514) suggested that "perhaps the greatest repository of stories in late modern societies is made up from the various organs of the mass media". If speculation that discordance with cultural scripts is associated with lower maternal wellbeing is correct and if, for mothers, the main source of cultural scripts, or stories, is the media, then one might argue that media representations of cultural scripts around parenting, which some mothers do not or cannot follow, may be associated with poorer wellbeing in those mothers.

2.4 Media Effects and Audience Interpretation

2.4.1 Outline

The speculation in the previous section, about how media may have an impact on wellbeing, relies on two intermediary positions. The first, based on Seale's arguments, that the media operates as a repository of cultural scripts from which people construct their identities and behaviours, and the second, that divergence from cultural scripts, and therefore appropriate behaviours and identities, impacts wellbeing. This review section examines some theories of media effects in order to identify potential mechanisms to

explain this first position of how the media might influence mothers' beliefs, attitudes and behaviours.

In their book *The Mommy Myth*, Douglas and Michaels detailed a concept they called 'new momism', which they linked to the ideals of 'intensive mothering' (Douglas and Michaels, 2005, pages 4 and 5). They argued that "'new momism' is a set of ideals, norms, and practices, most frequently and powerfully represented in the media" (2005, page 5) and that for mothers, 'new momism' is unavoidable because of media obsession with motherhood (2005, page 6):

> Women have been deluged by an ever-thickening mudslide of maternal media advice, programming, and marketing that powerfully shapes how we mothers feel about our relationships with our own kids and, indeed, how we feel about ourselves
>
> Douglas and Michaels, 2005, page 7

Their book is, broadly speaking, a study of media texts from the latter part of the 20th century, foregrounded by a particular interest "in the role the mass media played … in making the new momism a taken-for-granted, natural standard of how women should imagine their lives, conceive of fulfilment, arrange their priorities, and raise their kids" (2005, page 11). They do not provide theories of media effects as such, but rather argue that the "imagery [discussed in the book] has … provided us with a shared cultural history of becoming mothers in the United States, yet we may not appreciate the extent to which this common history has shaped our identities, our sense of success and failure as mothers, and the extent to which it ties us together through mutual collective memories" (2005, page 14). This implies an argument like Seale's, that media representations form cumulative and overlapping conceptualisations of appropriate behaviours and attitudes, which unavoidably inform everyone's own behaviours and attitudes.

In Morley's characterisation of media research in the mid twentieth century, a distinction can be seen between consideration of media effects on a mass scale and individual interpretation. He argued research oscillated between "message-based studies, which moved from an analysis of the content of messages to their 'effects' on audiences; and, on the other [hand], audience-based studies which focussed on the social characteristics, environment and, subsequently, 'needs' which audiences derived from, or brought to, the 'message'" (Morley, 1999, page 121).

The remainder of this section is structured using a distinction between widespread media effects and more individualist audience perceptions. While the distinction is initiated by

Morley, this section is not a history of research in this area, but rather a summary of scholarship which subsequently influenced and contextualised my later primary research findings.

2.4.2 Mass Scale Media Effects

There have been several different propositions for relationships between media and audiences and how such relationships alter the effect of media messages, summarised here by Burton:

- *Hypodermic effects* propose that the media directly influence people, largely adversely, 'injecting' them with views and behaviours
- *Copycat effects* propose a variation on this theme, which is about imitation of media behaviours
- *Inoculation theory* proposes that audiences become desensitized to the adverse qualities of media material through repetitious exposure to that material
- *Two-step flow theory* proposes that media influence is indirect, mediated through opinion makers in the media and through opinion leaders in the social groups inhabited by a given audience member …
- *Uses and gratifications theory* proposes that audience needs influence their choice and use of media material …
- *Cultivation theory* proposes that repetitive consumption of certain kinds of media material accumulatively cultivates certain kinds of attitudes and values

Burton, 2010, page 102

Apart from 'two-step flow theory' and 'uses and gratifications theory', the propositions listed pay little attention to the role of the audience, though Burton (2010, page 90) does argue elsewhere that "the audience may resist the underlying commercial intentions of the producer". The hypodermic effects model, where the media was seen as "having the power to 'inject' a repressive ideology directly into the consciousness of the masses" came from the Frankfurt School in the 1930s (Morley, 1999, page 120). When scholars from this School moved to the USA before the Second World War, American researchers considered the hypodermic model too sociologically naïve in the dismissal of intermediary structures between leaders/ the media, and the masses, and lack of consideration of pluralist American society (Morley, 1999, page 121). Though this model was largely dismissed many years ago, research into, and interest in media effects at mass scale continues, particularly with regards to concern about violence. Morley (1999, page 124) cited race riots and student protests in the USA in the 1960s as impetus to US Government interest in the influence of the media on violent behaviour. State researchers and commentators of this time and place concluded, according to Morley, that "TV was not a principal cause of

violence but rather, a contributing factor" (1999, page 124). The *U.S. National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence* of 1968 argued Morley, indicated the intense interest in the association of media messages with violence, and the difficulties in quantifying or even proving a relationship between them (1999, page 125).

In more specific relation to parenting, Shanahan's *Media Effects* (2021) opens anecdotally with observations about the radically different levels of independence allowed to American children in the 1960s compared to the 1990s. The difference, argues Shanahan, was due to parents' increased fears about child safety, despite there being minimal changes to rates of crime (2021, page 2). 'People' Shanahan discussed this with expressed surprise that crime rates had been relatively stable and concluded that the difference in parents' treatment of their children was due to altered perceptions of violence (Shanahan, 2021, page 2). Shanahan referenced specific media channels and increasing coverage of child abduction as rationale for changing perceptions of child safety, concluding "it is certainly an instructive example of how media images can affect our most basic perceptions and the cultural practices based on them" (Shanahan, 2021, pages 2 and 3). He ended his introduction with a suggestion directly relevant to this project: "media can play a shaping role in something as important as how we raise our children" (Shanahan, 2021, page 4). Shanahan goes on, over the course of the book, to examine various research and theories of media effects, some of which will and have been referenced here. I cite this anecdote though as it highlights some key points in this discussion: firstly, that when a mass social change is observed and explanations sought, media influence is often an early consideration, and secondly, that parenting is considered relatable, socially important, and influenceable by the media.

On this first point, Petley (1994 and 2012) provides an example of the moral panic surrounding 'video nasties' in the UK in the 1990s. Writing contemporaneously, Petley (1994, page 52) argued that: "According to most newspapers, Britain is awash with "video nasties"; which are openly available to young children; there is a direct causal link between the video *Child's Play 3* and the murders of James Bulger and Suzanne Capper; academics have at long last recognised the "obvious" link between screen violence and real-life crime; and the British Board of Film Classification is irresponsibly liberal in its decisions". The starting point for this moral outrage was, suggested Petley (1994, page 52), a need to find some explanations for the shocking murder of three-year-old James Bulger by two children only a few years older. In cases where people seek explanation for a surprising social event, it seems that the media has often been viewed as a possible answer.

> And it has ever been thus. Society became mass-mediated roughly in the 1830s, which was the time of the introduction of the popular newspapers … With these and the other new media that were introduced over the years (film, radio, TV, Internet, etc.) came social hand-wringing, moral panic, and more serious research-based concern about the effect of each new medium.
>
> Shanahan, 2021, page 5

Writing about large-scale investigations into the relationship between media representations and population level behaviour in the USA in the 1960s, Morley (1999, page 125) described a situation where researchers were unable to prove large scale media effects but suggested that the media acts in combination with other social factors to promote particular attitudes and behaviours. More recently, Foos and Bischof (2020, page 1) similarly argued that the relationship between public opinion and media representations is difficult to disentangle and very difficult to study. They suggested that the difficulty is partly due to self-selection of media sources, but also lack of opportunities for experimental conditions (Foos and Bischof, 2020, pages 1 and 3). In a self-published working paper (Foos and Bischof, 2020), they provided an example which broaches these conditions. Their quasi-experimental study investigated the possible relationship between a thirty-year boycott in the Merseyside area of the Sun newspaper (due to reporting of the Hillsborough disaster), and attitudes towards the European Union. They found suggestion that readership of the Sun newspaper, a Eurosceptic publication, to be much lower in the Merseyside area than other areas of Northern England, and also that attitudes towards the EU reported in the British Social Attitudes surveys and in the Brexit referendum of 2016 to be considerably more positive in Merseyside than other Northern English constituencies (ibid). There is a possible critique of this study in an argument that correlation does not necessarily mean causality. There is also an argument to be made for the complexity of influence on opinion across a population not being reflected in this study. However, as a rare example of a natural experiment in this area it is arguably somewhat compelling.

2.4.3 Audience Interpretation

Burton's list which I cited at the beginning of 2.4.2 can be seen as a variety of interconnected processes through which people might be influenced by the media. The focus of this subsection is consideration of the different effects those processes might have depending on the audience. Different people exposed to the same media messages may be affected by them in different ways: "[m]edia information is evaluated and interpreted in the context of previous information and experience … demographic factors can influence the frameworks within which people interpret media messages" (Irwin, 1999, page 219).

Irwin's argument for media interpretation differing by socio-demographic grouping links neatly with social identity theory, developed by Henri Tajfel in the 1970s. The latter involves processes of self-categorisation (identifying oneself with a particular group or groups) and social comparison ("we define our groups, and more generally who we are, partly by comparison with others" (Spears, 2011, page 203)). In social identity theory, a person identifying themselves with a particular group or groups (their *in group*) tends to hold that group (and other group members and common values) in high regard and other groups, which the individual does not identify with (*out groups*), in low regard, which in turn boosts the individual's self-esteem (Spears, 2011, page 203). Spears (2011, pages 203 and 204) refutes total acceptance of "the self-esteem hypothesis", arguing that group identity "not only provides us with a positive sense of esteem when comparisons are favorable, but it also provides us with a distinctive and meaningful identity, which is of value in itself in telling us who we are".

McKinley et al's (2014) research attempted to test the idea that group identity affects the impact of media messages. In the first part of their study, groups of Latina female college students watched music videos by one of two artists, Shakira (a Latina artist) and Britney Spears (a white artist) and then completed a questionnaire about the musical and rhythmic ability of groups of people as well as some on self-esteem. Students who watched the Latina artist's video were more likely to think the Latino groups in the scenarios had better musical and rhythmic ability, which predicted higher self-esteem scores (McKinley et al, 2014, page 1057). In a separate part of the study, white men and women were asked to read a newspaper article about an up-and-coming baseball player: one article featured an image of a white player; one an image of a Latino player and one had no image. McKinley et al (2014, pages 1060-1061) found that people who were shown the article with a picture of the white player, and who had levels of higher racial identification, tended to rate the white player's likability as a person and chances of success higher than participants who had viewed the article with no picture. There was no difference in terms of the questions about attitudes to Latinos.

Though there is much to criticise in McKinley et al's methods, the study provides some evidence base for the idea that viewing a positive depiction of an in-group member can improve self-esteem which has interesting implications for the possible impact of media messages about parenting on mothers' self-esteem and possibly wellbeing.

In her ethnographic study with mothers who breastfed to "full term" (between 1 and 8 years), Faircloth (2010b) foregrounded the notion of identity work as an explanatory mechanism for the activities and rationales presented by the women. In Faircloth's (2010b, page 359) analysis, identity work is framed as "the narrative processes of self-making that mothers engage in as they raise their children" and is linked to a changing perception of the word 'parent' from a noun to a verb; from something you are to something you do. Citing Hays' (1996) notion of intensive mothering, that good motherhood requires spending lots of money, energy and time raising children, Faircloth (2010b, page 359) argued that a climate of intensive mothering "has changed how parents experience their social role. Women in this study demonstrate one particular permutation of intensive mothering, which is sometimes opposed to, and at other times in congruence with, wider norms of childcare". For the participants in Faircloth's study, their decisions and rationale in relation to breastfeeding were informed by an active process of work to fit with particular identities in a dynamic relationship with wider or other social practices and groups.

Seale (2003, page 514) argued that people construct themselves, their identities, drawing on media messages as cultural scripts, in a reflexive process. This idea of a process aligns well to Faircloth's (and others' eg. Snow and Anderson, 1987) notions of identity work: identity as something people do as well as, or perhaps instead of, who they are. This also aligns more generally with 'uses and gratifications' theories of media effects. In Seale's writing, media impacts on audiences are more complex than that demonstrated in McKinley et al's study; he cites Gidden's argument that people incorporate "mediated experiences" into their behaviour in an active, selective, though not necessarily conscious way (Giddens, 1991, page 188 cited Seale, 2002, page 14). Media audiences, Seale (2003 pages 517 and 518) argues, are not naïve to media conventions and may resist, as well as align themselves with dominant messages. Media audiences can be active, not always passive, and are able to "'fill in the gaps' when they experience a fragment of an overall story" (Seale, 2003, page 518).

Milkie (1999) interviewed 14–16-year-old white and minority ethnicity girls about representations of women and girls in the media. The participants in the study generally viewed representations of women and girls as "unrealistic" and the non-white girls perceived the images to be focussed on white bodies, so not about them (Milkie, 1999, page 190). Although the white girls thought the images unrealistic, they believed that boys and other people in their lives use these images to evaluate them (the girls), with a possible impact on self-esteem. The white girls, argued Milkie (1999, pages 203 and 205), applied

"reflected appraisals" by "'filling in'… others' lives with the media as a public knowledge maker" as a way to guess the views and opinions of others. This has some resonance with the 'two-step flow' theory cited by Burton.

Counihan (1972, page 43, cited Morley, 1999, page 125) observed that the study of mass communications moved by the 1970s from concern with "'what the media do to people' to 'what people do to the media', for audiences were found to 'attend to' and 'perceive' media messages in a selective way, to tend to ignore or to subtly interpret those messages hostile to their particular viewpoints". The key change in thinking at this time, argued Couldry (2020, page 37), was the early work of Stuart Hall, who asserted that there was a need to "understand how an actual viewer *interprets* a programme from *their* world, and how that interpretation intersects, or not, with the interpretation that the producers had intended". It is important to consider the content of the media message, what the producers intend it to convey, and why. Central to this are considerations of power.

Kitzinger and Miller (1998, page 1) introduced their book on mass communication by commenting that the central strategy of UK government policy on AIDs and HIV in the 1980s was public education (including through television adverts), rather than care, punitive measures, or research. The government was involved in the scheduling of coordinated television programming about HIV and AIDS. In a qualitative media analysis of UK newspapers following the 2011 riots, Bristow (2013, paras 3.6 and abstract) identified three prominent discourses: moral collapse, "'poor parenting'", "parenting policy and the problem of discipline" and proposed a missing discourse about adult authority. Rather than the government having direct involvement in the content of media messages, as with the HIV and AIDS campaign of the 1980s, Bristow found reporting and discussion of government policy intertwined with moral evaluations of groups of people, namely troubled families. I raise these examples as they touch on considerations of power, specifically government power, in relation to media content.

In discussion of the relationship between media audiences and producers, Seale (2003, page 516) suggested that the notion of a feedback loop may be helpful in understanding that the distinction is in some instances, quite blurred. Instead of thinking there are government forces directing the framing of representations of parenting in the media, perhaps it is better to consider a complex, cyclic dynamic between media audiences, media producers and the government. Media producers are influenced by audiences in order to make content of interest and by some regulatory frames set by the government. The

government make policy with, presumably, the intention of benefitting society and a desire for popularity, for winning votes. The public are influenced by the media in how they construct their identities and the government in how they go about certain parts of their lives.

As well as flows of media production and interpretation, Couldry (2020, page 38) argues it is necessary to consider the variance in the situations and contexts in which media messages may reach an audience, which is a consideration of increasing importance in the time of internet mediated communication. “Some contexts are conducive to sitting down and carefully working out the meaning of a programme, but they are relatively rare. More often, media give us a glancing blow, like a post we scroll through on our phone. We may focus on that text for a short period, but our memory of it is quickly overwhelmed by the many other texts which crowd in upon us” (Couldry, 2020, pages 38 and 39).

2.4.4 A Changing Mediascape

The media environment many of the scholars I have cited were writing about is clearly very different to contemporary ones, a change largely due to digital technologies and internet connectivities. The feedback loop Seale (2003, page 516) described, between media audiences and producers, which might be slightly blurred, is in many cases now not so much a blur but thoroughly mixed. It is now possible for an individual to produce media content at home, by themselves, with relatively inexpensive equipment, and for millions of other people all over the world to watch, read or listen to it. The audience of that media content can then produce content of their own and similarly distribute it. People Tweet critiques of media texts, like television programmes or newspaper coverage, and mainstream media outlets reference Tweets in their content. This has clear implications for audience research:

> [T]he media environment has become more dense *and* more varied in the digital era. Thirty years ago, an audience researcher could assume that people got their news by following a national live news bulletin broadcast at fixed times of the day, or by reading a newspaper printed the night before. In the twenty-first century, such simplicities have disappeared
>
> Couldry, 2020, page 39

Das (2017, page 1260) argued that the decade between 2004 and 2014 was particularly important for changes to audience research: "the decade … with blurred boundaries of course, on each side, heralded a new, transformative decade for audience analysis – one where the very form, and shape, of mediated communication so profoundly questioned

concepts that had laid quite happily at the heart of all prior changes in mediated communicative conditions".

Taking as a priori that "our 'reality' as human beings who must live together is constructed through social processes" Couldry and Hepp (2017, pages 1 and 2) argued that "particularly with the introduction of social media … 'media' … literally are the spaces where, through communication, [people] enact the social". To synthesise these arguments then, media content is more complex and abundant than previously, the boundaries between audience and producers are often mixed, and the constructions of one's reality and identities is ever more mediated.

2.5 Aim and Research Questions

2.5.1 Conclusions from Literature and Directions for New Research

Three conclusions can be drawn from the literature reviewed. First, previous research has found media representations of parenting aligned with notions of parental determinism, intensive mothering and total motherhood. Second, endorsement of elements of intensive mothering ideology is associated with lower maternal wellbeing, and higher evaluations of maternal self-efficacy is associated with higher maternal wellbeing. Third, there are theoretical links between media effects, audience reception, and identity. From these findings, I suggested hypothetical links between media images aligned to parental determinism, maternal use of these images to construct socially appropriate opinions about parenting, and possible implications for maternal wellbeing from efforts to uphold these behaviours or from perceived failures of not upholding them.

These hypothesised links led to the development and formalisation of the aim and research questions for this project.

2.5.2 Research Aim

The aim of this research is to examine how 'parental determinism' is understood by mothers, the role of the media in shaping these understandings, and how mothers perceive these understandings to impact on their wellbeing.

2.5.3 Research Questions

Before data collection began, five research questions were established and used as a starting point in analysis. These were:

- What do mothers think are the key sources of their beliefs and attitudes on parenting?

- What are the main media channels mothers consider they are exposed to? How are they exposed to them?
- How do mothers perceive broadcast and social media to represent parenting? What are the relationships between mothers' perceptions of media representations of parenting and their media consumption?
- What impact do mothers think broadcast and social media representations of parenting have on the formation of their parenting identities and behaviours?
- What impact do mothers think their parenting identities and behaviours have on their wellbeing? What impact do mothers perceive broadcast and social media have on their wellbeing?

During analysis and later feedback from examiners, these questions were amended and then finally refined to be three core questions, with two intermediary questions. These questions are set out below and linked to key literature informing it.

1) What are mothers' understandings of parental determinism and to what extent do they endorse a causal association between their actions and their children's outcomes?

The very first iterations of this project mentioned seeking out mothers' perceptions around 'the science of parenting'. Reading of theoretical literature, particularly Lee et al's (2014) *Parenting Culture Studies* suggested the notion of 'parental determinism' as being potentially highly important to contemporary parenting culture in the UK, though seemingly little researched. In the first scoping literature review performed (Section 2.2), parental determinism was not specified in search terms or in inclusion/ exclusion criteria. However, considerable research with relevance to parental determinism was returned and, led by theoretical writing in the field of parenting culture studies, conceptual aspects of parental determinism formed the basis for analysis and discussion of the findings of this review. The second scoping literature review (Section 2.3) revealed research where maternal endorsement of intensive mothering ideology was examined empirically (Liss et al, 2012), and the relationship between such endorsement and wellbeing was investigated (Rizzo et al, 2013).

Though the terms of this project always included parenting culture studies, the focus on parental determinism came more inductively through study of existing literature. In this literature, it was established that ideas related to parental determinism were likely to be present in the lives of mothers in the UK. Also indicated was that though there had been research examining the presence in, and impact on, mothers' lives of intensive mothering

ideology, there seemed to be a scarcity of similar investigation of parental determinism. This research question sought to address this apparent gap in the literature.

2) What do mothers think are the key sources of their beliefs and attitudes on parenting and what impact do mothers think broadcast and social media representations of parenting have on their parenting identities and behaviours?

Seale (2003, page 514) argued that people use cultural scripts to form their sense of self and that, in late modern societies, the largest supply of these scripts can be found in various "organs" of mass media: "television, newspapers, magazines, radio and, increasingly, the Internet". However, people are exposed to messages and stories from a range of different sources. These may include their families, friends, partners, their own experiences of being parented, professional experiences and time in educational environments. These sources, and reflections on experiences, may also interact with each other. This question intended to seek out the views of mothers on what they think have been the key sources of their attitudes towards parenting and their reflections on the influence of, and relationships between, these sources.

Faircloth (2010) foregrounded the significance of identity work as an explanatory mechanism for the activities and rationales presented by the full-term breastfeeding women in her study. Faircloth's mobilisation of identity work: identity as something people broadly, and parents specifically, do as well as who they are, aligns well to Seale's (2003) argument that people construct themselves, their identities, drawing on media messages as cultural scripts, in a reflexive process, meaning these concepts are useful to apply together.

2a) What are the main media channels mothers consider they are exposed to?

Research by Ofcom and the Broadcasters' Audience Research Board (BARB) indicates that adults around 30 years old, the average age women become mothers in the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2016; National Records of Scotland, 2015), spend considerable amounts of time exposed to or consuming broadcast and social media (Ofcom, 2015; BARB, 2016). Moreover, BARB (2016, page 15) reports that "16-34 [year old] parents watch over twice as much television daily than their counterpart householders without children". There is clear suggestion that media of some form is likely to be important to mothers' lives.

2b) How do mothers perceive broadcast and social media to represent parenting?

In discussing findings of the work of the Glasgow Media Group in the 1990s, Kitzinger (1999, page 5) summarised that "common… across all the projects [conducted by the group] is people's impressive ability to recall certain aspects of media reporting… when provided with a few photographs from a particular film or programme, people can reproduce dialogue which closely echoes the actual words used during that episode (even if it was viewed weeks, or even months previously)". Kitzinger (1999, page 5) further argued that "people are fluent in the generic conventions of news and, although they may not be able to recall all the 'facts', they can often reconstruct particular phrases, images, impressions and narrative structures which recurred in the media coverage at the time".

In line with Kitzinger's findings, I thought it likely that mothers would be similarly aware of common media tropes about parenting and critique these media conventions, which may be important in examination of perceptions of media influence.

3) What impact do mothers think their parenting identities and behaviours and the media have on their wellbeing?

Important to this question was Rizzo et al.'s (2013) study which found greater endorsement of various aspects of intensive mothering ideology associated with poorer maternal wellbeing. The research indicated that incorporation of particular parenting ideologies into mothers' parenting identities and behaviours may be related to reduced wellbeing. The aim of Research Question Three was to investigate this association to address the hypothesis that discordance with cultural scripts represented in the media may be associated with reduced wellbeing.

Though the term 'wellbeing' is used frequently in human research and health messages (Dodge et al, 2012), discussion of how it should be defined is ongoing (Dodge, 2012). Suranyi- Unger (1981, page 132, cited Paim, 1995, page 297) described a range of conceptualisations of wellbeing: "At one extreme, individual well-being can be expressed in physical and biological terms; at the other extreme, it can be viewed as a state of happiness... Between the two extreme notions of individual well-being lies a multitude of other criteria, such as income and wealth, social position, the Maslowian hierarchy of accomplishments, personal power, spiritual or ideological achievement, and many others". Rather than use a specific measure of wellbeing and impose it on participants, I wanted to acknowledge the cultural and individually varied conceptualisations of the notion of wellbeing. I therefore set out to use participants' understandings of their own wellbeing as a guide to define and examine wellbeing in this study.

[3]

Chapter Three- Methods

3.1 Introduction

This chapter details the data sources and methods of analysis used in this PhD project. The core methods were initial interviews with 23 mothers and follow up interviews with eleven of those mothers. There were also two methods used for contextualising the project. These were analysis of 47 discussion threads from the online parenting forum *Netmums* and analysis of 49 BBC News items. This chapter includes the theoretical rationales for each method, the processes of data extraction and reflections on ethics and interpersonal relationships. The chapter concludes with a section on limitations.

3.2 Grounding for Methods

3.2.1 Epistemological and Methodological Approaches

The overarching epistemological approach taken in this project is interpretivist, necessarily involving a constructivist ontology. Constructivism is the belief that reality is shaped by social interactions (Irshaidat, 2019, page 16). As a result, essentialist 'facts' are dismissed in preference for the idea that reality is dynamic and not universal (Irshaidat, 2019, pages 16 and 17). Irshaidat, citing Brand (2009, cited Irshaidat, 2019, page 17) summarises "the ontological claim for the interpretive paradigm is to praise relativism in the construction of meaning, which prompts absolute dismissal of static reality".

I aimed for this project to be exploratory, proposing to examine the lived experiences of mothers, and how they conceptualise those experiences. To meet these aims, a qualitative

approach was chosen as qualitative research is "primarily interested in investigating how people experience the world and or how they make sense of it" (Gomm, 2004, page 7).

3.2.2 A Multimethod, Four Stage Approach

I used four methods in the hope of collecting and analysing data of sufficient depth and breadth to address the research questions; from different 'angles', and with each stage informing the collection and analysis of data in the succeeding stage. Though each stage did inform later stages, some data sources were more significant in the later analysis and are presented more prominently in this thesis. The methods are set out in this chapter in the order in which they took place, with a 'contextual' method preceding a batch of interviews (a core method).

3.3 (Contextual) Method 1a: Analysis of Online Parenting Forums

3.3.1 Rationale

Seale et al (2010, page 595) argued that the internet provides easily accessible, naturalistic, observational data of use in researching discussion of health issues.

Both *Mumsnet* and *Netmums* are well used British online parenting forums. In 2013, *Mumsnet* had over 1.2 million visitors every month (Pedersen and Smithson, 2013, page 99). Figures from *Netmums* suggest it has 25,000 new users per month (Pedersen and Smithson, 2013, page 102). Both forums are relatively easy to access, and it is possible to search and view topics without being a registered member. If one Googles 'parenting forum UK', the first result is *Mumsnet* and the second *Netmums* (most recently Googled February 2021). These are readily recognised media channels, and have been throughout the time of this PhD project. There is indication that though both popular, slightly different social demographic groups use them. The users of *Mumsnet* tend to have more than average household incomes though of the users of *Netmums*, only a minority do (Pedersen and Smithson, 2013, pages 101 and 102). Pedersen and Smithson (2013, page 102) argued *Mumsnet* users seem to show distain for *Netmums* and in doing so "display a type and level of cultural capital that can be read as forms of class distinction and class othering". In short, *Mumsnet* users tend to be more middle class than *Netmums* users.

I wanted to analyse content from both *Mumsnet* and *Netmums* due to their popularity with mothers in the UK, the ready availability of subject-specific observational data, and their spanning diverse social classes.

3.3.2 Piloting

Initially I carried out piloting and feasibility tests on both forums which showed that individual terms entered into the forum search facilities produced discussion threads which on scan reading seemed relevant.

Next, in November 2018, I searched the *Netmums* forum for a term likely to be used in later data extraction "tabloid(s)", using the forum search function, and analysed the discussion threads returned. The search produced 216 discussion threads, of which 23 were considered relevant. The oldest thread was initiated in December 2008 and the most recent in November 2017. Their length ranged from five to 407 posts, with a mean of 141 posts. Relevant threads were converted to a printer friendly version and copied into Microsoft Word documents. These Microsoft Word documents ran to a total of approximately 950 pages, with text at font size 12. I imported the Word documents to NVivo 11 (qualitative data management software), created thematic codes and allocated sections of the discussion threads into relevant codes. As the aim of the exercise was to consider if or how data and analysis of these forums could be used to answer my research questions, codes were based on and structured by initial research questions.

Although the discussion thread content was found to be relevant, perhaps the most significant finding was about the length of time taken to extract this data and perform initial analyses on it. Similar searches and analyses for perhaps eight key terms, across both forums, would take far too long to fit within the timeframes of the PhD project. It was therefore decided to restrict the searches to one forum. *Netmums* was chosen over *Mumsnet* since parenting culture studies literature suggested that more socially and economically deprived mothers may be particularly impacted by policy and media interest in parenting (Lee et al, 2014).

I experimented with using more parenting culture related words, like guilt, pressure, responsibility, blame and hot housing. However, searches using these terms did not return a sufficient density of relevant discussion.

3.3.3 Data Extraction

The *Netmums* forum was searched using the following search terms: “Tabloid”; “Broadsheet”; “Media”; “TV/Telly/Television”; “Program/Programme”; “Advert/Ad”; “Radio”; “Podcast”. Discussion threads returned were scan read for broad relevance to the project. Threads which had been inactive for more than five years were excluded. This was to ensure discussion was relatively contemporary and to limit data quantity to manageable amounts. Discussion threads were also excluded if they were instigated by a company or organisation, rather than an individual user. This was so discussion was directed by mothers, rather than commercial interests. Threads were excluded if they contained fewer than two posts as results shorter than this would not constitute a discussion.

Further refining of relevancy was done through more thorough reading of threads and excluding those which did not have relevance to at least two of the research questions.

Search term	Total results returned	Thread	Date of first post	Date of last post	Which RQ relevant to
Tabloid	146 (searched 08/05/2018)	Not all parents are female (Replies: 96, Views: 5,136)	12/11/2017	24/11/2017	1,2,3,4,5
		How old is to old (Replies: 130, Views: 5,370)	21/01/2017	27/01/2017	1,2,3,5
		Vaccine Information (Replies: 26, Views: 1,728)	22/01/2017	23/04/2017	1,2,3,4
		1 day old with dummies (Replies: 169, Views: 11,108)	04/10/2015	26/10/2015	1,2,3,5
		Social workers can kiss my A (Replies: 10, Views: 1,220)	30/07/2015	06/08/2015	2,3,5
		Homeschooling (Replies: 4, Views: 562)	30/06/2015	01/07/2015	1,3,4
		Can I stop my ex having my son play a dangerous sport (Replies: 19, Views: 1,173)	11/05/2015	12/05/2015	1,3,4
		Grrr Why do People Feel the Need to Put FF Down (Replies: 69; Views: 3,942)	18/03/2015	19/03/2015	1,2,3,5
		Sexual Consent Lessons age 11 (Replies: 62, Views: 3,283)	08/03/2015	09/03/2015	1,2
		A man just grabbed my daughter (Replies: 406, Views: 13,876)	03/11/2014	09/11/2014	1,2,3,4,5
		Horrible article Mail online (Replies: 102, Views: 4,241)	14/10/2014	16/10/2014	1,2,3,5
		girl of 12 becomes mum (Replies: 279, Views: 13,763)	17/04/2014	25/04/2014	1,2,5

		BABY IMMUNISATIONS YES OR NO (Replies: 300, Views: 18,067)	06/02/ 2014	01/08/ 2014	1,2,4,5
		Will Kate Middleton breast feed (Replies: 352, Views: 13,076)	22/07/ 2013	31/07/ 2013	1,2,3,4,5
		McCanns Crimwatch Twist (Replies: 152, Views: 9,818)	28/10/ 2013	12/11/ 2013	2,3,5
		Every Child In Scotland To Be monitored by the State from birth until the age of 18 (Replies: 191, Views: 7,725)	18/01/ 2014	09/07/ 2014	1,2,4,5
Media	124 (searched 08/05/2018)	Opinions on posting photos of the baby on social media (Replies: 21, Views: 2,048)	07/09/ 2015	07/09/ 2015	1,2,3,5
		Social Media Stress (Replies: 10, Views: 1,242)	18/07/ 2016	29/09/ 2016	2,3,5
		30 Weeks and I haven't announced pregnancy on Social Media (Replies: 26, Views: 2,232)	24/05/ 2017	31/05/ 2017	1,2,3,5
		Social media baby pics (Replies: 18, Views: 919)	19/03/ 2018	03/04/ 2018	2,3,5
		Pressure from media (Replies: 9, Views: 1,134)	29/02/ 2016	06/03/ 2016	1,2,3,4,5
		Social media (Replies: 26, Views: 2,428)	15/08/ 2016	04/12/ 2016	2,3,5
		Too much news of child rape abuse in the media (Replies: 33, Views: 2,031)	21/11/ 2014	25/11/ 2014	2,3,5
Broadsheet	98 (searched 08/05/2018)	extra Tution / education for daughter starting school (Replies: 23, Views: 1,845)	09/08/ 2013	02/10/ 2013	1, 4, 5
		Who actually biys the Daily Mail (Replies: 46, Views: 2,465)	16/12/ 2009	09/03/ 2014	2,3,(4),5
TV/Telly/ Television	190 (searched 08/05/2018)	Television adverts (Replies: 18, Views: 905)	08/09/ 2014	24/09/ 2014	2, 5
Program/ Programme	168 (searched 08/05/2018)	Stepson on TV Programme (Replies: 25, Views: 2,068)	24/04/ 2015	20/05/ 2015	2,3,5
		Baby TV programmes (Replies: 17, Views: 702)	24/10/ 2014	24/10/ 2014	1,2,3,5
		BBC1 Nick and Maragaret: We all pay benefits (Replies: 221, Views: 10,173)	11/07/ 2013	19/07/ 2013	2,3,5
		Questioning program outnumbered did anyone c it? (Replies: 3, Views: 768)	29/01/ 2014	29/01/ 2014	2,3,5
Advert/ Ad	167 (searched 16/05/2018)	Should NSPCC ads carry a trigger warning (Replies: 3, Views: 409)	08/10/ 2015	08/10/ 2015	2,3,5
		OMG THAT pampers premature baby advert (Replies: 7, Views: 687)	10/07/ 2017	11/07/ 2017	2,3,5
		Anyone seen the Ikea advert (Replies: 58, Views: 6,316)	17/07/ 2013	03/12/ 2013	1,2,3,5

		That Littlewoods advert (Replies: 140, Views: 8,564)	08/11/2011	29/03/2014	2,3,4,5
		Clearblue Advert (Replies: 10, Views: 1,693)	06/01/2014	09/01/2014	1,2,3,5
		Dettol pregnancy advert (Replies: 7, Views: 654)	17/02/2016	17/02/2016	1,2,3,4,5
		Nationwide advert! (Replies: 14, Views: 1,092)	06/06/2015	18/06/2015	2,3,5
Radio	179 (searched 16/05/2018)	great reads for adopters/prospective adopters (Replies: 12, Views: 9,262)	02/11/2014	02/11/2016	1,2,3,4
		Radio 2 Jeremy Vine show today? (Replies: 20, Views: 6,779)	14/11/2012	01/07/2014	2,3,5
		IVF discussion on my local radio (Replies: 25, Views: 1,156)	20/05/2014	21/05/2014	1,2,3,4,5
Podcast	160 (searched 16/05/2018)	recommended hypnobirthing podcasts (Replies: 2, Views: 6,575)	10/01/2014	14/01/2014	2,3,4
		Traumatised & fairly new Mother (Replies: 13, Views: 1,495)	25/06/2015	26/06/2015	2,3,4,5
		Twin pregnancy (Replies: 1, Views: 248)	08/01/2016	08/01/2016	1,2,3,5
		"High Risk" pregnancy Consultant appointment - what (Replies: 6, Views: 5,318)	12/01/2016	13/01/2016	1,2,4,5
		Help in getting a 5 month old into a routine and (Replies: 6, Views: 1,406)	10/03/2016	10/04/2016	1,2,3,4,5
		Hypnobirthing (Replies: 39, Views: 2,547)	29/02/2016	02/07/2016	2,3,4,5
		A STEP TOO FAR!!! (Replies: 48, Views: 3,445)	22/08/2013	03/09/2013	2,4,5

Table 3.1: Forum search results

Threads were converted to Word documents and imported to NVivo 11/12.

3.3.4 Analysis

The primary analytic method used was thematic analysis. This method was based on, but diverged in some ways, from that described by Braun and Clarke (2006). There is strong precedent for use of their method in analysis of qualitative data and the paper this method was featured in has been cited many thousands of times (Braun et al, 2022). I used their method due to their clear and reasoned description of it, but also, the method's apparent flexibility.

I carried out Braun and Clarke's first phase of analysis: "Familiarizing yourself with your data" (2006, page 87) through repeated reading of the discussion threads: first skim-reading to get a general sense of relevance, and therefore inclusion, then more detailed reading to determine which research questions might be addressed by analysis of the data.

My next steps could in some ways be considered a reversal of the order of Braun and Clarke's (2006, page 87) second and third phases. My initial method for sorting the data into codes began as a deductive process before becoming more inductive. The starting point for the generation of themes were the research questions. I created a set of 'higher-level' codes underneath which other themes and subthemes were formed via a more iterative, inductive process. This could be seen as roughly approximate to Braun and Clarke's third stage: "Searching for themes: Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each". Repeated reading of the data, coding within these 'higher-level' themes and observance of repeated sentiments and patterns of themes could be seen as approximating Braun and Clarke's second phase, "Generating initial codes: Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code". A complete list of the themes and subthemes can be seen in Appendix A.

Braun and Clarke's method (2006, page 87) has three more phases as follows:

4) Reviewing themes: Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.

5) Defining and naming themes: Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme

6) Producing the report: The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

I began conducting interviews while formal analysis of the forum data was still in relatively early stages and, although I broadly followed these steps, I made two important modifications to the process. One adaption was due to my plan to use the same coding framework for the forums as for data from interviews with mothers. As I had aimed from the outset to attempt some form of 'triangulation' or comparison between data sources, it seemed advantageous if this could be done using the same coding framework. There is likely to have been some difference in the prominence of some themes observed in the different data sets which may have shaped the refinement of themes in phase four (reviewing themes). Another variation I made in phase four was to create a table where I

could visualise how the themes operated alongside each other, in order to generate a "thematic 'map' of the analysis" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, page 87). Tabulating data in this way could be considered "charting", the preliminary stage of Framework Analysis (Gale et al, 2013). The use of Framework Analysis has considerable precedent in qualitative research and enables the researcher to "systematically reduce the data, in order to analyse it by case and by code" (Gale at al, 2013, page 2). The method is noted for its rigor and flexibility (Gale et al, 2013) and I had hoped my use of it would augment the thematic analysis method I was already using and allow for easier extraction of key messages from the data though visualisation.

The process of defining and naming themes occurred partly through discussion with supervisors but also in the planning for how the analyses were to be written up. Aligned to Braun and Clarke's sixth phase, the actual writing of this thesis involved continued analysis in the necessarily iterative process of editing, refining, re-ordering and general consideration of the themes and how they are presented in the text.

3.3.5 Ethical Considerations

My primary ethical concerns in the use of content from online forums were privacy for the participants and inability to gain consent for their participation in this research. As the data was obtained via a website owned by a company, there were also issues of copywrite to consider. An application was made to, and approval received from, the Research Ethics Committee of the College of Social Sciences at the University of Glasgow. In this application I outlined how privacy would be protected, cited precedents for this type of research without participant consent, and explained how this might still be considered ethically permissible.

With regards to protecting the privacy of participants, I considered previously published research to learn how others had approached the issue. In Pedersen's (2016) research using data from *Mumsnet*, posters' names were removed from the quotes presented. Pedersen (2016, page 34) argued that in removing these names, and because poster names are assumed to be pseudonymous, users' identities were relatively protected. Mackenzie (2017) focussed on one particular *Mumsnet* thread. Quotes were presented without poster names but were numbered, and therefore easily cross-referenced with the original. Hine's (2014, page 583) research using *Mumsnet* was more cautious than these. Not only were posters' names removed and direct quotes used "sparingly", such quotes were also

"adapted to obviate the risk of identifying the author by searching, whilst retaining the sense of the original". Following consideration of these examples, I formed the view that additional steps to protect the privacy of participants, particularly in the absence of their consent, should be paramount. I therefore decided to follow a method similar to Hine's in that though the discussion threads were downloaded to my computer and I analysed verbatim text, no direct quotes are cited in this thesis or any other public presentation. This, as Hine indicated, is to prevent the post author being identified by searching- that is by entering the quote into an internet search engine and being taken to the precise section of the forum featuring the original text, which would facilitate learning the poster's name and other activity by that poster. Key quotes, or sentiments are reworded and paraphrased. Though I recognise that these posters' content being only represented by my reworded interpretations may undermine accuracy, I would suggest that all the data presented, whether direct quotes from interviews or paraphrased forum posts, has been analysed and selectively presented by me in interpretive, subjective ways. In weighing up the potential harms and benefits, potential slight inaccuracies in interpreting or presenting sentiments was preferable to potentially exposing participant's identities.

On the issue of lack of consent to participate in this study, I again first reviewed the methods of similar research. The extent to which content on internet forums can be considered in the public domain is key to this. Seale et al (2010, page 598) argued that "because public access to [the forums studied is] either totally or almost open, we take the view that these messages are in the public domain and that their research use does not require informed consent or ethical review". Pedersen (2016, page 34) similarly argued that "*Mumsnet* is considered to be in the public sphere since it is not password protected and has a large number of registered users" and that their study was purely observational. In an earlier study, Pedersen gave a more expansive rationale for not obtaining consent from participants explaining "*Mumsnet* is an open-access public forum, and users are advised of this fact and that postings are open for all to see. [Not all] Users … accept contact from others in the community so contacting each poster quoted for informed consent is not possible" (Pedersen and Smithson, 2013, page 99). Hine (2014, page 583) also did not obtain permission from forum posters arguing "the discussions on Mumsnet are publicly available on the Internet, and indeed consciousness of this publicness is a feature of the site for many users". However, she conceded that "consciousness of being in public does not necessarily mean that users would wish to be an individual focus of research and commentary without their consent". This last point is the hardest to reconcile;

without asking an individual it is not possible to know if they would be comfortable with their words being used in research or commentary. However, this is something that could be applied to all areas of public life; it is not possible to give consent for any possible interpretation or discussion of one's everyday actions. There is a long-held tradition of media research where the content studied is considered in the public domain and therefore consent from the content creators is not required. This would include, for example, letters from members of the public published in newspapers, which could be seen to have some conceptual similarities to members of the public posting on public internet forums.

The data obtained and analysed from the internet forums comprised posts from many different users, some of which may have no longer been active users. Contacting individual users to seek consent would have been enormously time consuming and not necessarily possible in the case of inactive accounts. It is not clear what could have been done if no response was received. In short, obtaining consent from each individual user was not practical. In common with the other studies referenced, this was an opportunistic observational study of pre-existing data. The forums are accessible without passwords and users might ordinarily expect their words to be read by strangers. Guidance from the British Psychological Society (2017, page 8) states "Where it is reasonable to argue that there is likely no perception and/or expectation of privacy ... use of research data without gaining valid consent may be justifiable. However, particular care should be taken in ensuring that any data which may be made accessible as part of the research remains confidential". In the context of this study, in which users would be likely to consider the forums as relatively public, and I took various measures to protect the participants' anonymity, I aligned with the British Psychological Society and the authors of similar research, that not seeking consent was permissible and justifiable.

The British Psychological Society's guidance also considers wider legal aspects of the use of apparently publicly available internet content: copyright law. "While personal web pages may appear to be public documents, copyright remains with the author or web hosting company ... In a similar vein, ownership of 'public' content published on social network sites ... often remains with the web service provider" (British Psychological Society, 2017, page 8). I firstly referred to the Terms and Conditions of the *Netmums* site which state:

> All copyright ... and other intellectual property rights … arising from all materials, content and information on this site ... are owned or licensed by Netmums.

> Except where stated, none of the material may be copied, reproduced, distributed, republished, downloaded, displayed, posted, or transmitted in any form by any means, including but not limited to, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of Netmums.
>
> Permission is granted to access, download, or print such material for your personal, non-commercial use only and is subject to these terms and conditions.
>
> By submitting content to Netmums, including your first name, you grant Netmums a right to use, reproduce, modify, and publish it in other works. You also permit any member to access, display, view, store and reproduce such content for personal use.
>
> Netmums, 2021

Downloading and use of the forum data in this study was for non-commercial use. The terms state users implicitly permit any member accessing and reproducing their content for personal use. To address this allowance, I became a forum member under the name 'Hilllary C', and in the interests of transparency, stated on my profile that I was a social science researcher. To confirm the legality of my downloading data from *Netmums,* I referred to UK Government guidance (2021) which states "You are allowed to copy limited extracts of works when the use is non-commercial research or private study". My (computer assisted) analysis would also be permitted by this guidance: "An exception to copyright exists which allows researchers to make copies of any copyright material for the purpose of computational analysis if they already have the right to read the work (that is, they have 'lawful access' to the work). This exception only permits the making of copies for the purpose of text and data mining for non-commercial research". The guidance qualifies these exceptions to copyright with the following statement: "If your use is for non-commercial research you must ensure that the work you reproduce is supported by a sufficient acknowledgement". There exists a slight tension in this last stipulation between the protection of participant anonymity and content owner acknowledgement. I do not cite the names of users or quote directly in order to protect participant privacy; however, this could be seen as not acknowledging the source of this content. A compromise must therefore be reached in that I have clearly stated that the source of the data is the forum *Netmums.* In addition, in the text of this thesis, there is sufficient information for a reader to go to the *Netmums* site and view the same data I have in conducting the research.

3.4 (Core) Method One: Semi-Structured Interviews with Mothers

3.4.1 Rationale

The use of different methods and sources of data was with the intention of triangulating results to gain depth and range in available data. To contrast with the opportunistic, observational online data, I wanted to have some directed, purposefully generated data.

I chose to conduct semi- structured, individual interviews with mothers. A topic guide, rather than specific questions, was used to retain focus on the research aim while allowing for participants to speak about things they viewed as important and to allow for individuality while still addressing the research questions.

> One-to-one qualitative interviews are usually conducted with the aim of producing a picture of the interviewee as a person with their own way of understanding the world, although usually as having a way of understanding which can be taken as characteristic of people of the same category or in the same social circumstances
>
> Gomm, 2004, page 176

I had thought that if, as Gomm suggests, there is scope for viewing the understandings presented by different mothers to be characteristic of mothers in similar social circumstances, there may be opportunity for comparisons between key groups of mothers. My literature search on maternal wellbeing revealed some common factors associated with poor wellbeing. These included young maternal age, low levels of education, low incomes and having a child with conditions affecting their behaviour, as well as more complex findings about the association between maternal wellbeing and race, migration and religiosity. In my other literature review about media representations of parental determinism, I found that mothers who were younger, older, black or lesbian were focussed on differently in media representations and were, in many cases, stigmatised.

3.4.2 Recruitment Plans and Actuality

I initially intended to recruit a sample of mothers spanning four different social characteristics: relatively affluent, relatively deprived, having children with behavioural problems and of an ethnic minority. To achieve this, I planned to recruit participants from pre-existing mother and baby/child groups whose location, cost, or specified association would likely reflect these variables. I hoped to recruit 5-7 mothers from each type of group as follows:

- A group situated in a relatively affluent area, where there is a considerable charge to attend (I had thought courses run by the National Childbirth Trust in the West End or South Side areas of Glasgow could be options)

- A group situated in a relatively deprived area (through internet searching I had identified several free to attend groups in the south of Glasgow in an area identified in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation as in the 10% most deprived in Scotland)
- A group for mothers of children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder and/ or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ASD/ADHD) (I had identified two Glasgow based groups through internet searching)
- A group where there would likely be non-white mothers attending (I had identified a group attached to an Islamic community centre and another for migrant mothers)

I was unable to recruit participants from most of the groups I had initially thought of. In one case my request to attend a group was refused (courses run by the National Childbirth Trust), in some cases I was unable to contact the group organisers or the groups were no longer operating and in two cases I attended groups, but the mothers declined to participate in the study. This lack of success necessitated considerable searching and communication with other groups in the city and across Scotland. By far the most successful route for recruitment was via the co-ordinator of 'Bounce and Rhyme' sessions at public libraries across Glasgow. Via this individual, I was able to attend, and recruit from, sessions at libraries situated in demographically different areas of the city.

The groups successfully recruited from were:

- An ASD support group in the south of Glasgow- three mothers
- A mother and toddler group at an Islamic cultural centre- one mother
- Bounce and Rhyme sessions at the following libraries:
    - Pollokshaws Library (SIMD 1)- six mothers
    - Pollokshields Library (SIMD 5)- two mothers
    - Langside Library (SIMD 5)- three mothers
    - Elder Park Library (SIMD 2)- one mother
    - Ibrox Library (SIMD 3)- two mothers
    - Parkhead Library (SIMD 1)- one mother

Four further mothers were recruited from an employability group for young mothers. However, due to the time taken to gain access to this group, data from these mothers was collected at a later stage as discussed in section 3.6.2.

3.4.3 Participants

Nineteen mothers were recruited and interviewed at this stage. The ages and other details cited here were as they were at the time of initial interview, though there will have been various changes since then (as described in section 3.6.3).

Pseudonym	Biographical information
Alison	Aged 32 and working in administration at a university. She lived with her husband (who works in finance) and seven-month-old son in a suburban house in an area in the 10th least deprived decile
Sinead	Originally from Ireland. She had recently completed a doctorate and worked in paediatric mental healthcare. She lived in a 6th least deprived decile area with her nine-month-old son and husband who is a university lecturer
Julie and *Catriona*	A married couple who met at university. Julie worked as a police officer and Catriona in paediatric mental healthcare. They had a four and half month-old daughter who was birthed by Julie. They were living in a house in a suburban area considered in the 40% most deprived.
Rebecca	had a nine-month-old son and had recently returned to work following maternity leave to a job in the hospitality industry. Her husband is a project manager, and they were living in an area in the middle decile of the deprivation scale in Glasgow though are originally from a large town in the central belt of Scotland.
Madhuri	lived with her eleven-month-old daughter and husband (an IT developer) in a flat in a semi-urban area. She comes from India, where her family still live. She has also lived in Singapore. She has a professional background in HR but left work when daughter was born. Her husband had a working visa, and she had a dependent visa.
Annalie	had lived in the UK for two years having grown up in South Africa. Her first language is Afrikaans. She and her husband are both freelance classical musicians. They live with their baby daughter in a rented tenement flat. She described herself as an older mother.
Lauren	A 36-year-old museum professional. Her husband is originally from Iran and they had a three-month-old son.
Stacey	had a four-year-old son who had recently been diagnosed with autism. He had limited verbal ability and was not toilet trained. His start at school had just been deferred by a year. Stacey had worked in payroll but left due to the stress of caring for her son. She was seeking assessment for diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome which she believes she has shown signs of throughout her life. She was living with her husband who works in IT.
Caroline	was 49 years old and living with her partner Gary and their two children in a house in an area considered in the 10% most deprived. She had a 28-year-old daughter who was living nearby and was born when Caroline still lived with her parents. The father of her eldest daughter had not been involved in her daughter's life. Caroline has two daughters with her current partner, aged seven and six years. One of the daughters has autism. Caroline gave up work as a computer and office equipment trainer to look after her children though was due to start a university course in Law in the new academic year. She has fibromyalgia and is a practicing Catholic. Gary was made redundant and has two children from a previous relationship with whom he has no contact.
Sarah	was working in accountancy and her husband for a government organisation. They had a seven-and-a-half-month-old daughter and were

	living in an area in the middle of the SIMD scale. Her mother worked in education.
Iona	At the time of the initial interview, Iona was 21 years old and had a two-year-old daughter. She had been studying English at university but was taking a year out. Iona has a history of anxiety. She had been in a relationship with her partner for five years. He was 27 years old, Muslim and originally from Pakistan. He runs his own shop. They were living in mortgaged accommodation in an area considered in the 20% most deprived.
Paige	was 23 years old and living in accommodation run by a mental health charity in an area considered in the 10% most deprived. She spent much of her childhood in the care of social services, having experienced abuse. She has borderline personality disorder. Her son was four months old and living with a foster carer. She saw him four times a week and he did not stay overnight with her. She was hoping that he would be living with her full time in the next year. Paige's main social contacts were through a charity that she volunteered with.
Shona	A scientist on maternity leave at the time of interview. Her husband is also a scientist. They met at university and were 34 and 33 years old respectively. Their son was three and a half months old, and they were living in a house in an area considered in the 20% least deprived
Aroofa	A 26-year-old PhD student from Pakistan. She was living with her husband and 20-month-old son in a flat in an area considered in the 10% most deprived. Her husband was studying for an MRes. Aroofa is Muslim.
Angela	has two sons, one aged 12 years and one aged ten years. Her elder son has autism, ADHD, Pica and a bowel condition. Her younger son may have ADHD but had not been diagnosed. She was 39 years old and had studied physiology and sport science at university. She worked as a gym manager before changing career to work for a parenting organisation. She had initially encountered the organisation when attending parenting classes. Her partner and father of her children works as a plasterer. They were living in an area considered in the 20% most deprived.
Gillian	Aged 42 years old at the time of interview and had a seven-month-old son. She was working in a social role for the NHS having completed a distance learning university degree "later in life". Her partner was working as a programmer.
Elizabeth	had a toddler age daughter and was pregnant with a second child. She was 28 years old and living in an area in the middle of the SIMD scale. She was working as a self-employed musician and was heavily involved in the folk music scene, where she met her husband who is also a musician.
Fadhila	was born in the USA, lived in various countries as a child, and went to university in the USA where she qualified as an auditor. She had not been able to work in the UK as an auditor due to apparent lack of transferability of auditor qualifications and expertise between the two countries. She was 37 years old and had a six-year-old daughter and two sons, one aged four years and one aged five months. She met her husband

	in Pakistan where they went to school together and kept in touch afterwards. She was living in a house with her husband and children, his parents, and his sibling's family, which include another three children who were being home schooled. The whole family are practicing Muslims

Table 3.2 Biographical information on mothers interviewed in method two

When participants are quoted in the findings chapters, I cite their background information in a notation format following their pseudonyms: age; the deprivation decile for their locality as categorised in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (2016) (1st most deprived, 10th least deprived); number of children and age group; whether they have a university degree (indicated by "U"); and occupation. I also indicate their country of origin if it is not the UK.

3.4.4 Development of the Interview Topic Guide and Piloting

The starting point for the topic guide were the initial research questions. I went through them and formulated possible interview prompts related to each. These prompts were discussed with supervisors and refined. Some additional prompts were added, and some were reworded. The topic guides were submitted to, and approved by, the ethics committee and I was clear in the application that these prompts were a guide, not a verbatim pro-forma. The intention was always to use these prompts to ensure all research questions were addressed while allowing participants opportunity to branch off, in conversation, to issues of importance to them.

I carried out a small piloting exercise interviewing six mothers recruited from the first library group I attended. I reviewed the interviews and decided that the procedure and topic guide had scope to collect data of sufficient relevance so did not alter them.

3.4.5 Analysis

The primary method of analysis of the interview data was thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) method. As described in section 3.3.4, the method involves six phases, which I slightly amended. I was in the process of analysing internet forum data when I began to collect interview data. This meant that I could use both interview and forum data to develop initial codes inductively (after the ones based on the research questions), which I developed into themes through iterative reviewing of the data. I used the same NVivo file to analyse both the forum and interview data.

One major difference between the forum and the interview data was the amount of biographical data I could access about the participants. At the start of each interview, I asked questions about participants' family make up, residential information, and information about their jobs, education and how old they were. This meant that with the chart I produced there might be scope for comparisons to be made between participants in terms of their biographical information and views on various issues. This was after Gomm's (2004, page 189) suggestion for the potential for thematic analysis: "The analyst looks for themes which are present in the whole set of interviews and creates a framework of these for making comparisons and contrasts between the different respondents".

3.4.6 Ethical Considerations

Important to me and required by the organisations under which this research was carried out (University of Glasgow, Medical Research Council), this project followed ethical principles including beneficence, non-maleficence, rigor, transparency, honesty and care and respect of participants and their contributions to research (University of Glasgow, 2018, page 1). Vanclay et al (2013, pages 246-248) carried out an analysis of key documents and a broader literature review of ethical guidelines and stipulations for research. They concluded that there are 18 common principals. I provide brief notes here on how this project might be considered to meet each of these principles:

(1) *Respect for participants.* This principal is partly about interactions with the participant, which I discuss in more detail later in section 3.4.7, but also about true and fair representations of their contributions in the analysis of the data. This latter issue is one I touch on in discussion of reflexivity, also in section 3.4.7.

(2) *Informed consent.* All participants and several prospective participants were given an information sheet (Appendix C) which explained the project and completed consent forms which referenced this information (Appendix B). The information sheet addressed several of Vanclay et al's other ethical principles: (3) *Specific permission required for audio or video recording;* (4) *Voluntary participation and no coercion* (this was combined with efforts in my interactions with potential participants to make this clear)*;* (5) *Participant right to withdraw;* (6) *Full disclosure of funding sources;* (12) *Confidentiality of personal matters;* (16) *Provision of grievance procedures*

(7) *No harm to participants.* Before each interview, I tried to ensure, and check with the participant, that the environment was sufficiently private that they might feel comfortable having frank discussions. I prepared a plan for what I would do should a participant become distressed (pause, stop the recording, verbally comfort as appropriate, give the participant time and space, ask if they would like to continue). I had also identified groups and avenues of support that I could direct the participant to.

(8) *Avoidance of undue intrusion.* In interviews I did not probe further than the remit of the topic area. I made efforts to make the interview process as convenient as possible for the mother.

(9) *No use of deception.* The information sheet set out the purpose of the study. This was not deviated from. In cases where mothers seemed to be seeking approval from me due to a perception of some sort of authority, I tried to clarify that I did not position myself in authority and that I was seeking *their views*, not any "correct" answers.

(10) *The presumption and preservation of anonymity.* Participants were given pseudonyms. Giving participants pseudonyms to protect their identities is a common practice in social science research but name choice is sometimes not reflected upon (Lahman et al, 2015, page 445; Allen and Wiles, 2016, page 149). Names can help signify gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, class and personality. It is important to consider participant names and pseudonyms in terms of power (Allen and Wiles, 2016, page 149). In common with Lahman et al (2015, pages 446 and 447), I hold intersectional feminist beliefs so wanted choose pseudonyms with similar cultural signifiers to participants actual names in order to reflect and respect their identities. To do this, I referenced lists of popular names in the countries of participants' origins. In most cases this was via the National Records of Scotland (NRS) who hold ranked lists of the most popular names given to babies in Scotland in different years and decades from 1974 onwards. I looked up participants' first names the list relevant to when they were born (or 1974 for those born earlier). I then chose a name of a similar popularity (hoping that this would address some of the names' cultural signifiers, particularly around age). To address some of the other signifiers, I used a much more subjective process, where I simply chose names of similar popularity that seemed suitable to me. Where the participant had a Gaelic name, I opted for the most similarly popular also Gaelic name, or if the name was obviously English in origin, or Irish or Scots, I would look for another English/ Irish/ Scots origin name. I am not an expert in the origin of names and acknowledge that such subjective choices are not necessarily accurate. For participants from countries other than Scotland, I firstly sought out similar dated baby name lists. This was only available for the Republic of Ireland. For participants from other countries, I used much less rigorous sources, including websites for name inspiration for new parents. These sources are clearly limited due to the lack of specificity of popularity, dating, and because I could only use English language websites. Again, I must acknowledge likely inaccuracies and subjective differences of opinion in these choices, particularly due to my lack of familiarity with the cultural signifiers attached to names in countries such as Pakistan, India and South Africa. I had initially asked some participants if they would like to choose a pseudonym for themselves, but this was declined.

(11) *Participant right to check and modify a transcript.* Information on this was not given in the participant information sheet or consent form. However, one participant expressed an interest in reviewing the transcripts of her interviews, which I sent her. She did not request any alterations to the transcript

(13) *Data protection.* I produced and adhered to a data management plan. This plan met stipulations set out in various pieces of legislation and was reviewed by appropriate staff before data collection began. I have taken care to store data in secure locations with due attention to the protection of participants' identities.

(14) *Enabling participation*. This principal is about ensuring equity of opportunity for participation. While I made efforts to make interviews as convenient as possible for the participant, so that those who wanted to participate were not prevented by logistical difficulties, and at group meetings attempted to approach all attendees, there was specific

selection of the groups that were attended. As detailed elsewhere, I had wanted to recruit participants with particular demographic characteristics and so groups were selected with likely membership in mind. The selection of groups in this way could be considered purposeful.

(15) *Ethical governance.* The proposed data collection methods and rationales were detailed in a submission to the Ethics Committee of the College of Social Sciences, University of Glasgow. This submission was approved.

(17) *Appropriateness of research methodology.* The research methodology used was chosen and considered in collaboration with my PhD supervisors, both experienced researchers. The proposed methods were approved by an appropriate Ethics Committee.

(18) *Full reporting of methods.* I have made efforts to report in this chapter the methods used with appropriate completeness

3.4.7 Reflexivity

Ann Oakley argued, in the 1970s and 80s, for consideration of the interview as a social interaction necessarily involving gendered subjectivities, refuting impartiality and objectivity as desirable or achievable (Oakley, 2016, page 196; Bondi, 2009, page 328). Central to this feminist approach to research is consideration of the social relationship between the researcher and participants, a practice referred to as reflexivity (Bondi, 2009, page 328). “Reflexivity acknowledges that all knowledge bears the impress of the social relations entailed in its production, including the complex power relations between researchers and research participants” (Bondi, 2009, page 328). Oakley’s research, upon which these arguments were based, was with new mothers, so it seems appropriate and indeed necessary, that I should make reflexive considerations about this research also with (mostly) new mothers.

I became acutely aware at secondary school that perceptions of my gender performance and likely sexuality placed me in the somewhat socially marginalised category of ‘queer’. This queerness has become an important part of my self-constructed identity(/ies) and social relationships. Perceptions of my gender and sexuality are likely to have formed part of how the participants constructed their understandings of me and influenced our interactions. Oakley argued that features of the interviews she was involved in incorporated social processes including “transitions to friendship”, which were based upon “shared gender subordination”, which she referred to as “sisterhood” (Oakley, 2016, page 196). While I think it likely many, if not most, participants perceived me as a woman (therefore like them), they may well have perceived me a different kind of woman (and therefore different to them). This perceived otherness, though without the solidarity between Oakley and her interviewees’, may also have been useful, or at least not harmful, to the social relationships I built with the women I interviewed. It is possible that my

perceived otherness may have created a sense of social distance into which disclosures could be made without fear of judgement by somebody who had been in the same conceptual positions and relational situations. There was one particular instance where my perceived queerness may have been identified as a sameness: Having been part of a library group who were introduced to my project, Julie was quite unusual in her proactive approach to me, clearly wanting to take part in the research. I do not know how Julie identifies in terms of sexuality, but she is in a same sex marriage with another of the participants, Catriona. In the interviews with Julie and Catriona, there was laughter and rapport, but perhaps less common ground between them and myself than I had with other participants. Although we may share a queerness, there were clearly other aspects to our identities and personalities that meant rapport, and in some cases, something approaching "transitions to friendship", were easier with other participants.

In later writing, Oakley acknowledged critiques of her arguments about interviewing, that there was not appropriate attention given to "the dynamics of power and social divisions between women" (Oakley, 2016, page 197). She cited Phoenix's argument that "notions about feminist interviewing as a 'cosy enterprise' based on shared gender understandings ignore differences between women in terms of race, class, status, sexual orientation, politics, age and so forth" (Phoenix, 1994, page 50, cited Oakley, 2016, page 197). In interviews I made statements which I had hoped would position me in the minds of participants as a non-expert, seeking 'correct' answers from them, and not having any authority in the area of parenting whatsoever. I had expected more enquiries as to whether I had children, but these did not come. Perhaps this too created some relational space, where I would hope participants might think they could disclose their views without judgement.

There were some mothers with whom I struck up an easy rapport, and some with whom I seemed to share similar interests. There were some participants who spoke at great length and others from whom I struggled to prompt anything but the briefest of responses. In the findings chapters that follow, I have been mindful to present the range of views expressed by the mothers, though there are some participants who I cite more than others. This may be because their views were specifically remarkable, were shared with, but more concise than other mothers, or simply because the length of their interviews and range of topics they covered meant that I had more material to draw from on them. I acknowledge that not only were the interviews inextricably altered by my behaviours and perceived aspects of my identities, but also that the quotes I selected may well not be the same as those others

might have selected. Limerick et al (1996, page 458, 450, cited Oakley, 2016, page 208) argue that the product of research is "our story of their story", so perhaps such subjective choices and variable presentation of results is inevitable.

3.5 (Contextual) Method 2a: Analysis of Key Media Cited by Mothers

3.5.1 Rationale

The third stage of data collection was to analyse representations of parenting in key media channels cited by mothers as important to them, building on data collected in previous stages and informing the next stage. The intention was to share findings of this analysis with focus groups of mothers, in part as participant validation, but also as additional data generation, forming the final stage of data collection.

In my literature review of media depictions of parenting, I suggested that the preponderance of research studying print media, particularly newspapers, may reflect convenience and perceived methodological rigor in searching and analysing these types of media, rather than the importance of these media to mothers or parents.

Aligned to Seale's (2003) suggestion that people use the media to construct their identities, this stage of data collection was designed to start to address how the media might be involved in the shaping of mothers' perceptions about parenting, by looking at how parenting is represented in media they actually consume.

3.5.2 Media Cited by Mothers

All the mothers initially interviewed (n=19) were asked about the media that they regularly used, with the mothers themselves determining what the term "media" meant to them, though with some nudges that this could include television programmes, radio stations, magazines, newspapers, billboard posters, social network sites, other websites and many other types. These questions were intended to give a picture of the media landscape which they were surrounded by, and their conceptualisations of it. It also led on to questions about how they thought parenting is represented in different media and media influence on themselves and others.

Their answers to this are key to Research Question 2a ("What are the main media channels mothers are exposed to?"). All the mothers interviewed used social media, primarily *Facebook*. This arguably indicates that social media in general and *Facebook* specifically comprise the key media channel(s) used by the mothers interviewed and therefore should

be the primary site of analysis. However, a number of challenges mean that a meaningful analysis may not be possible. My central concern was that because social media is characterised by self-directed content, it was unlikely that the content viewed by one mother interviewed would have substantial overlap with other mothers interviewed. Several of the mothers mentioned being part of parenting related groups on *Facebook* or discussed following particular people or groups on *Twitter* and *Instagram*, and though it would have been possible to analyse the feeds of particular groups or people, no two mothers mentioned the same one. One internet source comprised of user generated content that was mentioned more than once was parenting forums; five mothers mentioned *Mumsnet*, two mentioned *Netmums* and six mentioned unspecified parenting forums. An analysis of *Netmums* formed the first stage of my data collection. Though only one mother mentioned it specifically, potentially the content would be recognised by many of the mothers.

In social media, the content is produced by the users, so producers and audience cannot be considered distinct groups. With traditional media, these groups are (more) separate. There can therefore be some analysis of the producer's editorial slant. Also, the content of a particular issue of a newspaper, for example, is the same for all readers. Therefore, in the interests of widespread relevancy, a traditional media source that was used by as many of the mothers as possible was chosen.

There was little commonality of traditional broadcast or print media reported. However, some mentioned keeping up with news and current affairs and of those that did, the most common source was the BBC. Of the BBC platforms, the most common was radio (used by seven mothers), then the *BBC News* app or website (three mothers), and then *BBC News* on television (one mother).

3.5.3 BBC News

Outside of my study, the BBC has been shown to be a broadly popular news source: Ofcom's research found *BBC One* was the most popular news source (preferred by 62%), followed by *ITV/ STV/ ITV Wales/UTV* (41%), *Facebook* (33%), *BBC News* channel (26%), *Sky News Channel* (24%) and *BBC News* website/ app (23%) (Ofcom, 2018, page 21). Their survey also indicated that television in general was the most used medium for news (79%), followed by the internet (64%) (Ofcom, 2018, page 14).

The *BBC News* website, as opposed to BBC television or radio news, was selected as the media channel in this analysis as the relative convenience and rigor allowed by the way the

BBC News website is indexed means a more complete and quickly acquired corpus of data is possible. While it is noted that more mothers interviewed listened to BBC radio than accessed *BBC New*s online content and that in Ofcom's research, *BBC New*s on television was prioritised higher by users than the *BBC News* website/ app (Ofcom, 2018), *BBC News*' online content seemed to be reasonably important for both these groups. Following the launch of the *BBC News* website in 1997, the site has become a major global news source and come to be viewed as the BBC's "third broadcast medium" (Thorsen, 2010, page 213). While the items presented on different *BBC News* platforms may not be the same, as the BBC's editorial standards (including commitments to truth, impartiality and editorial independence) apply to all the BBC's outlets (BBC, 2019), they should all, presumably, follow this same ethos. Interestingly, Ofcom's research indicated that the *BBC News* website/ app was considered more impartial (68% to 61% and 62%), more trustworthy (76% to 73% and 71%), more accurate (78% to 74% and 73%) and more high quality (81% to 79% and 76%) than BBC television and radio (Ofcom, 2018, pages 91, 95 and 98).

3.5.4 Data Extraction

News items were obtained from the *BBC News* website using a four-stage collection process. First, all items on the *BBC News* website tagged under the topic "parenting", published within six months of the search, were reviewed. Items were manually filtered for relevancy with some removed as they were not about the practice or experience of parenting but about, for example, service provision. A six-month cut-off date was selected in order to ensure the results returned were a manageable number while large enough that an impression of how the BBC currently represents parenting could be assessed. The next stage was a form of "snowballing"- the BBC links to other pieces that are related (but not necessarily tagged as under the topic of parenting). The items linked to were similarly filtered and selected if relevant and published in the last six months. The process by which news items are topic tagged is unclear and during the snowballing process, it was noticed that some relevant items were not tagged as parenting. Additional results were obtained by using *Google* advanced search facilities to search for items on the *BBC News* website that featured the word "parenting" and were published in the last six months. Many of these were duplicates of ones already found but additional items were recovered. During this search it was revealed that there is a tag called "motherhood" on *BBC News*. This topic list is sparser than the parenting one and mainly duplicates others already returned, though two more results were found.

Forty-nine different items were returned following the four-stage collection process (Table 3.3), five were videos, one was a sound clip from the radio, and the remainder were text pieces, most with images.

3.5.5 Analysis

Items were coded thematically using NVivo (version 11), and with a separate coding framework to that used in Stages One and Two. The initial starting point for this analysis were the themes identified in coding of the literature review of research into media representations of parenting (Chapter Two, section 2.2.3), which were: Framing; Skills; Experts; Risk; Potentiality; Responsibility; Governmentality. During initial reading of the news items, it seemed that all these themes would be relevant to the discussion of representations of parenting on *BBC News*. In order to address issues relevant to the overall PhD topic, and based on the original Research Questions, two more themes were included: one related to Maternal Wellbeing and one on Media Influence.

The key themes and subthemes related to each news item is summarised here:

Search	Title	Themes/ subthemes	URL
Topic tagged as Parenting https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cvenzmgygl7t/parenting dates between 16/02/2019 and 01/09/2018. Search performed 21/02/2019	Children are Being Potty Trained Later in Life [video]	**Experts, skills**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p07031yg
	Do Children in Two-Parent Families do Better?	**Responsibility, governmentality, risk/ potentiality**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-47057787?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cvenzmgygl7t/parenting&link_location=live-reporting-correspondent
	Feeding Your Baby: Six Mums on the Plan Versus the Reality [video]	**Responsibility, experts, maternal wellbeing**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-47032159/feeding-your-baby-six-mums-on-the-plan-versus-the-reality?intlink_from_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.bbc.co.uk%2Fnews%2Ftopics%2Fcvenzmgygl7t%2Fparenting&link_location=live-reporting-map
	Parents' Vaccine Side Effects Fear 'Fuelled by Social Media'	**Media influence, risk, responsibility**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-46972429?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cvenzmgygl7t/parenting&link_location=live-reporting-story
	App Designed To Make You a Better Parent	**Skills**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p06xpdy2
	Worry Less About Children's Screen Use, Parents Told	**Experts, risk, framing (of children)**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-46749232?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cvenzmgygl7t/parenting&link_location=live-reporting-story

	Breastfeeding and Formula Feeding Mums Share Advice [video]	**Framing (motherhood), maternal wellbeing**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/stories-46486327/breastfeeding-and-formula-feeding-mums-share-advice?intlink_from_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.bbc.co.uk%2Fnews%2Ftopics%2Fcvenzmgygl7t%2Fparenting&link_location=live-reporting-map
	Ohio Dad Makes Girl Walk Miles to School for Bullying on Bus	**Skills, risk (to society)**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-46471438?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cvenzmgygl7t/parenting&link_location=live-reporting-story
	Parental Leave: The Good, the Bad and the Unexpected	**Framing (parenting is hard), skills**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-46399467?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cvenzmgygl7t/parenting&link_location=live-reporting-story
	Parents 'Must not Abdicate Duties' to Teachers, Says Ofsted	**Responsibility, governmentality, risk (to society)**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-46416421?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cvenzmgygl7t/parenting&link_location=live-reporting-story
	France MPs Vote to Ban Child Smacking	**Governmentality, framing (children and adults)**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-46397087?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cvenzmgygl7t/parenting&link_location=live-reporting-story
	Why Maternity Leave can be Harder and Lonelier than you Imagine	**Framing (parenting is hard), maternal wellbeing**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-46221187?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cvenzmgygl7t/parenting&link_location=live-reporting-story
	Parents 'Not Wholly to Blame for Child Weight Gain'	**Skills, risk, governmentality**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-46262619?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cvenzmgygl7t/parenting&link_location=live-reporting-story
	Parents 'Need to put Their Phones in a Box', MPs Told [video]	**Experts, risk (to children)**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/46200008/parents-need-to-put-their-phones-in-a-box-mps-told?intlink_from_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.bbc.co.uk%2Fnews%2Ftopics%2Fcvenzmgygl7t%2Fparenting&link_location=live-reporting-map
	'Deeds not Words': The Single Dad Teaching Men to be Fathers	**Framing (fatherhood), experts**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-45862436?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cvenzmgygl7t/parenting&link_location=live-reporting-story
	Welsh Government Parenting Advice Labelled 'Patronising' [features video]	**Experts, governmentality**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-45992777?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cvenzmgygl7t/parenting&link_location=live-reporting-story
	Baby Box Safety Doubts Raised by Experts	**Governmentality, experts, risk**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-45889226?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cvenzmgygl7t/parenting&link_location=live-reporting-story

	Stepfathers' Youth a Factor in Child Homicides - Study	**Risk, framing (of fathers), governmentality**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-45731941?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cvenzmgygl7t/parenting&link_location=live-reporting-story
	Social Media Guidelines for Young People to be Drawn Up	**Governmentality, experts**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-45696988?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cvenzmgygl7t/parenting&link_location=live-reporting-story
	It's 'Never Too Late' for Parenting Advice, Study Says	**Framing (critical periods), governmentality, experts**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-45652699?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cvenzmgygl7t/parenting&link_location=live-reporting-story
Snowballing	Single Mum Shares Secrets of Survival to Encourage Others	**Framing (mothers) experts, governmentality**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-46592182
	Don't be Taken in by Anti-Vaccine Myths on Social Media	**Media influence, risk (to society)**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-45990874
	Tips on How to Limit Excessive Screen Time	**Experts, skills**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-46758809
	Reality Check: Why Did Child Screen Advice not go Further?	**Governmentality, responsibility, risk (evaluation of)**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-46758599
	Limiting Children's Screen Time Linked to Better Cognition	**Risks, potentiality**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-45651725
	Bullying: Children Point Finger at Adults	**Framing (adults)**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-46140135
	Kirstie Allsopp's Parenting Tips: 'I Smashed my Kids' iPads'	**Skills, framing (children, class)**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-45472216
	Children's Screen Time has Little Effect on Sleep, says Study	**Experts, risk**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-46109023
	Flu Vaccine 'Working Better for Children'	**Risk (to society)**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-47332484
	Flu Jab: 'Vaccinate Children to Protect Older People'	**Potentiality (society),**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-46635782

		framing (anti child centred)	
Advanced Google search for word "parenting", within site www.bbc.co.uk/news, date range 01/09/2018-25/02/2019. Search performed 25/02/2019	Are Parents Prepared for Holiday Hangovers?	**Responsibility, risk, framing (older parents)**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-46565556
	The Words You'd Love to Hear your Children Say - but Never Do	**Framing (of children, parents and their relationships), skills**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-45450648
	Parenting Site Mumsnet Hit by Data Breach	**Media influence, maternal wellbeing**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-47169466
	Good Genes? The Sisters who Put the Rest of us to Shame	**Skills, potentiality**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-46361764
	Bereaved Mother Criticises Facebook Over Baby Ads	**Media influence, framing (motherhood)**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-46543324
	Are Teachers' Christmas Gifts Getting Out of Control?	**Framing (children, expectations of parents)**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-46580014
	Five-Year-Old Boy's 15-Page CV Grabs China Online Attention	**Framing (intensive motherhood), governmentality, media influence**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-46071811
	Piers Morgan Mocks Daniel Craig for Carrying Baby	**Framing (fatherhood, men), media influence**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-45873664
	Kirstie Allsopp Leaves Twitter over iPad Smashing Backlash	**Skills, media influence, risk**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-45483606
	A White Family Raised Me - I Learned to Love Being Black'	**Framing (race, identity, motherhood)**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/stories-46544904
	Somerset Survey: Girls See 'Self-Harm as Stress-Relief'	**Experts**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-46342699

	Parents Asked to Pay for Books and to Attend Events	**Framing (parenting), governmentality**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-46047654
	Baby Dies After Being Left Alone While Mum Smokes Cannabis	**Risk, governmentality**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-45970026
	Fresh Call for Smacking to be Outlawed in the Home	**Risk, experts, framing (parents)**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-45483347
	Jersey Politicians Vote to Outlaw Smacking Children	**Governmentality, framing (parents)**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-jersey-46879367
	Anglesey School Plea not to Buy Staff Christmas Gifts	**Framing**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-46489219
	Highlands-Based Mellow Babies Project Aims to Help Mums	**Framing (critical periods), maternal wellbeing, risk (to society)**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-47116075
Topic tagged "motherhood" https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/c77jz3mdqq1t/motherhood back to 01/09/2018. Search performed 25/02/2019	Remarkable' Decline in Fertility Rates	**Framing (children and women), risk (to society)**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-46118103?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/c77jz3mdqq1t/motherhood&link_location=live-reporting-story
	World Mental Health Day: How Perinatal Service Helped Mum	**Maternal wellbeing, risk, governmentality**	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-45796762?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/c77jz3mdqq1t/motherhood&link_location=live-reporting-story

Table 3.3: BBC News items and key themes within them

3.6 (Core) Method Two: Follow Up Interviews with Mothers

3.6.1 Rationale

This final method was initially intended to combine participant validation and additional primary data collection. In the participant validation element, I had thought that sharing initial findings with previously interviewed mothers would be useful in addressing some of the subjectivities discussed in section 3.4.7. I initially thought doing this through focus groups may mean that I could glean data on interactions and discursive, collaborative conceptual development between participants. However, due to logistical difficulties in convening focus groups, I opted instead to pursue follow-up interviews using *BBC News* items as prompts and recapping and exploring topics based on previous individual interview responses.

3.6.2 Pilot (Group) Interview

The opportunity to access, and potentially recruit, mothers attending groups for young parents required lengthy negotiation with gatekeepers. When an opportunity did arise, it was late in the data collection process. Due to the timetabling of the course which this group was part of, there was only scope to conduct a group interview, not individual ones. As this interview would be different in format from the previous individual ones and was done following analysis of *BBC News* items and shortly before follow up interviews, it was decided to use it as a piloting exercise for use of the *BBC News* for later data collection stages, not a late addition to Core Method One.

The mothers recruited at this stage constituted all the attendees of an employability course on that day. Due to the format of the group discussion, I was unable to glean as much demographic information on them as I had in individual interviews with other mothers. The group consisted of:

Pseudonym	Biographical information
Jessica	Aged in her mid-twenties and had two children, one aged three and one five years. She was married and living in an area of the 10% most deprived. She had unspecified health conditions which caused fatigue. She was unemployed and reported regularly attending similar groups.
Jade	Aged in her mid-twenties and had a five-year-old son and two stepchildren, one aged twelve years and one fifteen years. She was married and living in an area of the 10% most deprived.
Alena	Aged in her late teens and had a nine-month-old child. She lived in an area of the 10% most deprived. Alena was very reluctant to talk during the interview, even with direct questioning.

Amber	Was twenty years old and had a twenty-three-month-old daughter. She was no longer in a relationship with the father of her child and she and her daughter were living with her parents.

Table 3.4: Biographical information on mothers interviewed in pilot group, core method two

In the findings chapters these participants are quoted with demographic information given in the same notation format as explained in section 3.4.3.

At the start of the group interview, I asked some introductory questions to ascertain basic demographic information and then played the *BBC News* item *Breastfeeding and Formula Feeding Mums Share Advice,* which is a seven-and-a-half-minute video. I was struck by the increase in the participants' willingness to talk after the video. They seemed to recognise several of the experiences the mothers in the video recounted and this prompted individual disclosures and discussion within the group. I also showed them the BBC item *Ohio Dad Makes Girl Walk Miles to School for Bullying on Bus,* which was recognised from discussion on social media.

This pilot interview indicated that showing participants news items, particularly the video of mothers talking out their experiences of infant feeding, was effective in eliciting participants' similar or contrasting experiences, and useful in prompting discussion of topics not easily explored in interviews otherwise.

3.6.3 Topic Guides

I viewed the follow up interviews as an opportunity to fill in gaps, or add detail, to topics not explored in sufficient depth in initial interviews. These gaps were identified in preliminary analysis of already collected data. I wanted to glean additional data on maternal wellbeing and parenting beliefs/ media representations; media influence more generally; the broader societal effects of parenting practices; and about parenting practices to improve children's outcomes, rather than avoid harm. I selected four *BBC News* items which I thought might prompt discussions of these topics. They were:

- The video *Breastfeeding and formula feeding mums share advice.* After this video, and related to specific points in the film, I asked questions about feeling pressured to carry out certain parenting behaviours, in particular ways; where this pressure has come from; and if this pressure has caused any emotional responses. I also asked questions about parenting experts and training courses. I then asked questions about physical wellbeing; some about sacrifice and some about conceptualisations

of good motherhood. Finally, I asked some broad questions about maternal wellbeing and the relationships between parenting and wellbeing.

- *Parents' vaccine side effects fear 'fuelled by social media'.* I used this news item to prompt discussion of media influence by asking questions about mothers' perceptions of the influence of the media on themselves and others, and if they had had any emotional responses to media images.
- *Ohio dad makes girl walk miles to school for bullying on bus.* This news item included not just a story about a man's parenting behaviour, but also readers' responses. I used this discussion as a prompt for questions about the effects of parenting behaviours on wider social contexts.
- *Five-year-old boy's 15-page CV grabs China online attention.* There was commentary in this news item about parenting action improving the social opportunities for their children and I used this as a prompt for questions related to 'potentiality', which is an area of analysis discussed in Chapter Four.

The topic guide for these interviews was drafted and discussed with my supervisors and some amendments were made to individual questions though as the intention was to use the questions as a guide, rather than a script, these changes were minor.

3.6.4 Recruitment

All the original interviewees were contacted again and asked if they were willing to participate in this stage of data collection. The low response rate and limited availability of those who did respond meant that forming focus groups was unlikely to be possible. This led to reflection on the rationale for this additional stage of data collection. Although I had wanted to conduct focus groups in the hope of collecting data on how discussions developed in a group, it was more important to glean additional data on topics identified as sparse in analysis of initial interviews. I therefore decided that individual interviews would not only be more practical, but also likely to fulfil the more important objectives for this stage of data collection. Eleven of the mothers agreed to be interviewed again.

The follow up interviews were carried out several months to just over a year after the initial interviews. As well as everybody being older, there were some changes that had occurred which were specific to different mothers. These changes included:

Alison had now returned to work following maternity leave.

Julie and Catriona. Julie had returned to work after maternity leave and their daughter was looked after by grandparents while they were both working.

Rebecca and her husband and son had moved back to the large town in the central belt of Scotland where they were originally from. She commuted into Glasgow semi-regularly for work.

Lauren had returned to work following maternity leave.

Stacey had been diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome. Her son, who was still mainly non-verbal, but now almost six years old, was due to start mainstream school in the next few months.

Iona had completed her university degree and passed her driving test. She had had another baby, who was now nine months old. They (and her partner) had moved to a different area.

Aroofa was continuing with her PhD.

Angela did not report any specific changes since the first interview.

Elizabeth had given birth to another daughter.

Fadhila had found work as an auditor. Her mother had moved from Pakistan to live with them, in the same house as various in-laws. Her mother cared for her children while Fadhila was at work. Fadhila's mother-in-law had developed cancer and Fadhila reported some pressure on her to stop working and stay at home to care for her.

It is important to note, that there were two mothers (Paige and Madhuri) whose telephones were no longer operational when I tried to contact them. While they may well have changed their phone contracts, it is also possible that they were without mobile phones at that time. If the latter was the case, then there is perhaps indication of the differing access to communication and media technologies across the sample.

3.7 Limitations

There are two major ways in which the project was limited. The first, relating to participant sampling, was not deliberate, while the second, using only qualitative methods, *was* deliberate.

My initial plan for participant recruitment was to interview between 20 and 40 mothers recruited from different mother and baby groups. I proposed a variety of groups with the

idea that particular groups may be more likely attended by middle class mothers, working class mothers, mothers of children with behavioural conditions and Black and minority ethnic mothers. From existing literature, there was an impression that media and policy about parenting may focus on mothers from these groups in various ways. I encountered many problems with access to some parenting groups, and at some of the ones I did access, the mothers present were reluctant to talk to me and declined to participate in interviews. This meant that after several months of recruitment, I had not yet interviewed 20 mothers, and of those that I had, there was a skew in the sample towards middle class mothers in their late twenties to thirties. I was just about to close recruitment when I was offered the chance to attend and conduct a group interview with young mothers at an employability group. Due to time constraints, I was unlikely to be able to conduct follow up interviews with these mothers, as I had with the initial sample. I therefore decided to add in a dimension from the next round of data collection: presenting the mothers with *BBC News* items to prompt discussion. So, although the total sample size increased and included more young mothers on low incomes, the group became a data source distinct from the other interviews. Similar questions were asked across interviews, so it was possible to make some comparisons, though this group interview did not allow for in-depth questioning of any individuals. I was also not able to recruit for interview any Black or minority ethnic mother who was born and brought up in the UK. Though a mother with particular characteristics would never be representative of other mothers with similar characteristics, the omission or scarcity of mothers with some characteristics meant aspects of their experiences, may not be represented in this project.

A second factor which could be considered a limitation was the exclusion of any quantitative measures. I had wanted to conduct a qualitative study so as to collect and discuss in depth and individual data. I had considered other methods like media diaries to collect short term media use activity. I did not pursue this method out of concern that it was too burdensome for participants. One method I did not consider until after data had been collected was to go through, as part of the interview, a series of questions with answers on a Likert scale. These questions could have perhaps included asking mothers to rate wellbeing and any changes to wellbeing related to becoming a mother, rating their agreement with various sentiments relating to parental determinism ideals, as well as listing (in order) influences on their parenting beliefs and behaviours. Though I could have identified a validated measure of wellbeing, there is no validated tool to measure the other areas and the size of my sample was not large enough to have any statistical power. The

ratings would also be limited in terms of gaining genuine understanding of mothers' views. However, when used in combination with the semi-structured interviews, they could have provided prompts for qualitative questioning, simplified comparisons between participants with regards to views on particular issues and possibly enabled more conclusive inferences.

[4]

Chapter Four- Understandings and Endorsement of Parental Determinism

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is an examination of mothers' attitudes about, and experiences of, parenting, exploring how far they support the concept of parental determinism. This examination is made using data from 47 online forum threads and interviews with 23 mothers. The data is presented by key themes, outlined below:

4.2 Causality

> A central component of Furedi's conceptualisation of parental determinism is a causal association between parental action and outcomes for children and society

4.3 Risk and potentiality

> In this causal association, there are questions of direction of outcome: whether parental actions have positive or negative effects. This leads to discussion of harms and benefits, both to the outcomes of children and to society.

4.4 Individuality and governmentality

> Discussions of causality and responsibility lead to an examination of maternal endorsements of an individualisation of parenting, which is in a context of notions of governmentality and wider structures of governance.

4.5 Framing

> Important to understandings of parental determinism as situated in contemporary parenting culture are framings of various parties involved; of children, society, and parents.

Data are presented using direct quotes from interviews and paraphrased dialogue from online forums, along with my interpretations of the data.

This chapter closes by considering how my analysis of the data endorses, refutes or complicates arguments in the field of parenting culture studies.

4.2 Causality

The vast majority of mothers interviewed supported the idea that their parenting practices had an effect on their children's development. However, there were degrees of endorsement. As part of the analysis of the interview transcripts, I made notes in relation to expression of varying levels of endorsement of the causality aspect of parental determinism. Using these notes, I was able to categorise each participant in to three categories- those who expressed high endorsement of parental determinism, those with mixed views, and those who expressed sentiments of low endorsement of a direct causal association between everyday parenting behaviours and the outcomes of their children. The mothers were not asked to rate their endorsement of parental determinism on a scale but rather asked open questions about the idea. The categorisation of their responses presented in Table 4.1 is therefore based on my interpretation of their comments.

High	Alison	Relatively high endorsement of PD in terms of reflecting on own childhood and parenting she (and her husband) experienced and the connection to mental health issues experienced as a child and later in life
	Julie and Catriona	Discussed ideas of child self-actualisation- that parents' role is to allow their child to develop as she will develop, without traumatising her. Quite high, particularly around blame. Several references to influence of class.
	Annalie	In some ways quite high- mentioned critical periods. Also mentioned other influential factors. Worries she might not be 'good enough' as a parent.
	Lauren	Quite high in terms of causality and various aspects of intensive mothering. Certainly indicated that there are particular ways of parenting and viewed some as better than others
	Iona	Relatively high in terms of commitment to activities that she feels have benefit to daughter. Also expressed own parent's disengagement and fears of harm has had a negative effect on herself
	Paige	High: cites own experience of growing up in the care system. Discussed how parental action had to begin when child is young- alluded to critical periods
	Aroofa	Quite high- thinks parents are a major influence on the way their children turn out. Also mentions idea that parents can harm their children by pressurising them in to doing things
	Jessica	Quite high- does not like the way her mother is/ has raised her brothers

Mixed	Rebecca	Quite high in relation to breastfeeding. Some seemingly intensive mothering activities, particularly around labour intensive, but to offset financially expensive. Talked a lot about own mother's endorsement of attachment parenting
	Sinead	Variable. In some ways quite high- focussed on emotional intelligence and the importance of relationships and nurturing to accomplish that, rather than educational curriculum at early age. However, also talks of "good enough parent" and other important factors.
	Madhuri	Much more focussed on intensive mothering- very child centred, labour intensive, some essentialism in that she seems to view it as mothers' role. Seemed to view parenting as a skill set that can be taught and learnt. “I think it’s every person and every parents who thinks like how the baby gonna be, so like initially, we decide a future for them. But, later on when they are grown-ups though they are the one who, you know, decide what to do and whatnot.”
	Gillian	Ambivalent- "I’ve not had a child that’s grown up to see if, you know, what I’ve done has influenced". However, endorses by doing various activities and comparing to partner's brother's parenting which she obviously does not rate. Work experience means that she has seen people who have suffered from poor parenting but has also seen people who have not done well but had many social advantages. Would not use the phrase "I blame the parents"
Low	Stacey	Relatively low- talks about other important factors and argued that parents are often blamed. Says she tries to bring him up with good manners but it is hard with a child with additional needs
	Caroline	In some ways quite low- talks about child self-actualisation and other important factors in child's life. However, talked passionately about children being the future of society and how if parents were not pressurised in to going to work, they could produce a better society through raising their children better. Talked about parenting being hard.
	Sarah	Quite low. However, has spent considerable time reading up on things and doing activities with daughter.
	Shona	Quite low, though does reference doing things which may be of benefit to son
	Angela	Quite low- mentions doing the same things for both children and they react differently.
	Jade	Quite low- "I think a lot of it can depend on the community as well, class struggles, who they are hanging about with, what your teachers are like. There is the pressure on the parents, however parents can’t do much, it is everybody else by the time they get to that age."
	Amber	Quite low: "There’s not a difference really, in kids who were breastfed and bottle fed. If you looked at all our kids, you wouldn’t know what kids were what. I don’t know why it gets pushed so much."

Table 4.1 Endorsement of parental determinism

Some mothers in interviews, like Alison and Aroofa, identified parenting practices as crucially shaping outcomes for their child:

> I think [parents] are basically [the single most important factor in how a child turns out], I think that you'd… you'd be very, very unusual, if you weren't the product of your parents in a major way … I think no matter what … the make-up of your brain is like, no matter what your friends are like or the school you go to, a lot of it does come down to the most basic sort of way that you're taught to engage with people, you know, the behaviour that's modelled in front of you
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

There was considerable nuance in the endorsement of this causality aspect by some mothers, like Lauren and Caroline, who cited other factors in a child's life that may influence outcomes:

> I think, you know, peer group and the school you go to and where you live, you know, will have a huge influence, but I do think that parents have a huge effect on how you turn out because of how you interact or deal with those different things is usually influenced by your parents, I guess.
>
> Lauren (36; SIMD 4; one baby son; U; museum professional)

As well as a child's social environment being cited as influential to shaping a child's outcomes, Iona, Caroline and Sarah either mentioned the importance of genetics or argued, using the example of differences between themselves and their siblings despite experiencing similar parenting, that there must be other, perhaps innate factors that shape an individual's outcomes.

> I don't think it can be entirely down to parenting because I mean, as I've said, I've got a brother and a sister, and we all grew up in an identical scenario and we are all hugely different from each other. We have hugely different views, opinions, ideals, our lives have taken hugely different directions, albeit we're still very close. But, I think yes, it perhaps, parenting perhaps shapes the foundations of the person. But… I think that… genetically people are kind of designed to be who they're going to be.
>
> Caroline (49; SIMD 1; two mid age daughters, one with autism, one adult daughter, currently unemployed though due to start university soon)

In this idea of innate, individual factors that shape a person, there was a conceptualisation of children as self-actualising, that that there are some essential aspects to their child, which play out to shape their lives. This was expressed by some mothers who at other times in the interview quite strongly endorsed parental practices as being highly influential.

> I would definitely be interested in him doing [music]. Just getting able to express himself a wee bit with like music and art, that kinda thing, so definitely as he gets older, I'd like to… I'd like to try these things and see if he enjoys it, you know,

> ‘cause his dad’s very musical and I went to art school for my undergrad degree, so I think that together, these are things that we’ve both enjoyed, so he hopefully will as well. But, if he doesn’t, so I think there are, I can see that he’s a wee individual with a personality, I wouldn’t be disappointed if he wasn’t interested in the things I’m interested in.
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

Catriona laughingly responded to a question about how she wanted to parent with “I suppose just getting her to be who she’s meant to be without causing her too much trauma”. I think Catriona was hinting at an idea that not only does her daughter have a sort of predestined path, but that she and her partner could inadvertently move her off that path, causing her harm. Madhuri, on the other hand, wanted to look to her daughter for clues to her path, and assist her to reach whatever aspirations she may have:

> So, it depends up on her interest, like what activity she would like to do. So, we just figure it out according to that. And, yes, we’ll try to give her best. So, like it’s never been predicted what’s gonna happen. But, yes, we’ll go with the flow, but we—what we dream for her to give her a better life in that way, like whatever she wants we’ll just try to fulfil her dreams.
>
> Madhuri (early 30s; SIMD 5; one baby daughter; U; unemployed though professional background in HR; originally from India)

Sarah expressed a fairly agnostic view of causality:

> What some of the stuff I’ve read suggests that yeah, you know, you can never start too soon with like, we read to her every day and like several times a day, and she gets a bedtime story, and she gets books during the day and stuff like that. I don’t know. I don’t know. But, it’s a good way, she finds she enjoys it, so I'm not doing anything that like, “Oh, this will be good for you long term, but you’re not enjoying it.” I’m doing it to entertain her short term but picking things that have, may potentially got long term benefit. But whether they have or not… We’ll never really be able to tell like, you know, “Did going to that class on that Wednesday mean that you were a wonderful pianist later in life?” Or, “Does that have no impact whatsoever?” You know?
>
> Sarah (30s; SIMD 6; one baby daughter; accountancy related field)

In mentioning things Sarah has read, there is a suggestion of acknowledgement of widespread endorsement of causal association, and perhaps that Sarah believes it, while having some scepticism. Amongst acknowledgements of widespread endorsement and personal scepticism, were hints at resistance. Sarah also talked about how the phrase “I blame the parents” was used as a family joke:

> So, that’s something my mum says all the time … All the time, but she worked in a school … So, it would be like if one of them was like badly behaved or whatever

> and then she'd be like, "I blame the parents." You know, it would be that kind of flippant comment … But … I guess we probably… use it as a kind of joke in the family … You know, like, or if me and my sister, like if we were misbehaving or we got drunk at a party or something, we'd be like, "Blame the parents," You know, that kind of thing … Yeah, I'd say more of a joke than, than a truth.
>
> Sarah (30s; SIMD 6; one baby daughter; accountancy related field)

Sarah mentions that her mother works in a school, perhaps presuming this will be understood as a site where there is high endorsement of causality, and that it is her mother who has brought this phrase, ostensibly about family relationships, into family life, as a joke. Jokes, of course, rely on shared cultural understandings with some sort of flip, or skew, of reality, to make them funny. My interpretation of this joke is not that Sarah and her family do not believe there is an element of truth to parental causality, but rather that Sarah and her family are surrounded by a rhetoric of causality and blame, aligned to Furedi's idea of a state of paranoid parenting, but are secure in their own parenting practices and the outcomes of their children. The flipping of reality is not a denial of causality, but rather an acknowledgement of it in the form of shared values, and a close relationship. Jokes have been viewed as a form of political resistance (Bryant, 2006, page 136), perhaps most obviously through satire, and humour can be used as "resistance to dominant power structures to offer small 'sites of resistance' for minority groups that possess limited agency" (Watts, 2007, page 259). In this case, I would argue that the resistance is not to causality, but rather paranoid parenting, where parental blame becomes a catchphrase, all parents are situated as potentially harmful and parental control becomes a performance:

> In the aftermath of the Columbine shootings, the question "Where were the parents?" was repeated time and time again. Many observers assume that parents are morally culpable for every misfortune involving children, and thus feel under considerable pressure to demonstrate that they are fanatically committed to policing their children.
>
> Furedi, 2008, Page 19

> [I]t is not just a small group of irresponsible mothers and fathers who are seen to constitute a problem but *all* parents.
>
> Furedi, 2014, page ix

Some of Angela's comments also seemed to indicate some sort of resistance to societal pressure put on parents, this time in relation to causality.

> So for me, like, there's quite a lot of negative publicity about [autism], and I think some parents see it as you're allowing your child to behave that way, and it's your

> parenting. And the parenting becomes quite a negative focus, and it's like, "well you need to go on this course, and you need to go on that course". When actually, you don't … Unless you're living it, you don't actually know what it involves, and every child is different. So I think, I think that's the difficulty with autism, because every child is unique, and they are different. It comes across differently in different people, so. For me, I think parents do have a lot to shape, but I think that a lot of pressure's put on parents, as if it's their parenting that's wrong. I work for a national parenting organisation now, because, we go out and deliver courses to parents, and it's because the self-esteem in the parents goes right down to the floor. It's as if you're the worst parent in the world and your child is the way they are because of your parenting techniques. When it's not that at all, it's just the fact that the child is struggling with lots of different things, but there's not enough training, there's not enough courses out there for parents to be able to get put on to understand these kind of things.

Angela (39; SIMD 2; two mid aged sons, both with behavioural conditions; U; works for parenting organisation)

At first reading, Angela seems to be quite contradictory about parenting courses. However, my interpretation is that she is critical of courses designed to teach parenting techniques but encouraging of courses related to information about autism and emotional support for parents. Angela has lower endorsement of causality than some of the other mothers, though this lower endorsement is not resistance. The acts of resistance, in the form of setting up courses to improve parental self-esteem and understanding of autism, are instead against ubiquitous blame put on parents.

Furedi's notion of parental determinism is centred on a causal association not just between parental action and children's outcomes, but also by extension, society. Several of the mothers interviewed talked about how their parenting practices could have an impact on society.

> I'm going to be raising this child 'til he's eighteen, and he can sort of make his own decisions'. So the pressure's on me to make sure I bring him up the way that I think's fit, and the way that I think's morally right, and that I teach him to be polite, and I teach him manners and I teach him to be decent to women.

Rebecca (early 30s; SIMD 5; one baby son; U; hospitality)

> The prisons are full of people who've experienced trauma and poor parenting. And the sort of, I think even going back to sort of intergenerational drug use and being on benefits and all that kind of thing is huge. I think there's, there's the sort of, there's outliers where what's perceived to be a good upbringing leads to somebody who takes that path. I think there's always more to that story and that's somebody that's come across unfortunate circumstances. I don't think that anybody's born tae crime or drugs or those kind of, kinda things that you maybe would've if you knew your child was gonna be a heroin addict you maybe would've chosen differently to whether you have a child or not, I don't know. And it's just a miserable life, isn't

> it, to, you know, there's the bit about the drain on society but there's also the bit about if you're addicted to drugs or in jail and whatever that's miserable. And we don't want that for anybody so…
>
> Julie (mid 30s; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; U; police officer)

Rebecca argued that by teaching her son, when still a child, how to operate in society in a respectful way, as an adult he might choose to continue to behave in this way. Though not explicitly voiced, perhaps there is an implication that this would be beneficial for society. Julie, a police officer, presents quite a complex argument, at first indicating a connection between poor parenting and criminality, then that perhaps if people realised their children would have socially undesirable outcomes they would not have them (which has a flavour of self-imposed eugenics), but then arguing that this is not just because future generations with undesirable outcomes would harm society, but because the children themselves would not have a nice or fulfilling life. This argument seems to me to be very much evaluating the dynamic between social and personal wellbeing, and the expectation for parents to be thinking of the future. Fadhila also presents a complex argument which stretches across the dynamic of the social and individual, but also duty and reward.

> As a Muslim, one of the most important jobs, quote unquote, of a mother, is to raise good children. Like children that are… that are helpful, that are kind, that are… you know, just good people, okay? … Because… and it's so important, because she is basically raising the future … She is raising kind of like the next generation that's coming along … I feel responsibility towards that. On the other hand … when you've invested so much time and effort and, of your own, into something, which is like, for example, raising a child … you want to feel like that effort was worth something. You want to feel like, yes I've raised a person that is a … contributing member of society … I personally feel that it's my duty, in the sense that … I think that first there's the religious aspect, and then there's second, is where … I've put in eight years of my life… where I took away from my career, and everything that gave me happiness, essentially, and… and I invested it in these kids. And if someone was to say, "Right, okay, twenty years from now, they will all be – God forbid – serial killers," I will be like … was my life just wasted? So I think there's that kind of aspect, where you feel like, okay, you did something, and you should get the reward for it, you know? … And then I think you … owe it to wherever it is that you're living if you live in the society where, you know, for example, over here, education is free. If my child was able to return that… that favour of being able to, you know, go to school free over here, and become someone, and return that favour, then that would be a good thing.
>
> Fadhila (37; SIMD 5; one baby son, one mid age son, one mid age daughter, U, auditor, from USA and Pakistan)

There was very little discussion of endorsement of the causality aspect of parental determinism on online parenting forums. However, there was discussion of social concepts

relevant to parental determinism, like responsibility and framings of society, which may indicate some implicit endorsement of causality.

4.3 Risk and Potentiality

Comments from mothers about causality sometimes featured discussion of divergence of outcomes, either towards the positive or negative. I use the terms "risk" and "potentiality" to examine conceptualisations of different ends of a spectrum of outcomes. Some mothers interviewed were concerned with the risk of harm occurring to their children and eventually to society. At times this was from external harms, which they are responsible for mitigating, but also that their own actions may cause harm. I also reference a theoretical conceptualisation of potentiality as the flip side of risk, where transformational possibilities are imagined and aspired to, in order to consider some other statements from mothers.

The authors of *Parenting Culture Studies* acknowledge risk as a core concept in parental determinism and "central to books about specific topics that have been influential to our thinking" (Lee, 2014, page 11). To paraphrase with extreme brevity, Lee (2014) argues that a parenting culture centred on consciousness of risk is one which thinks that anything that can go wrong, will go wrong; that children are vulnerable and the world is generally harmful; that there is a crisis of meaning where people are preoccupied with what they should do, but unsure what that actually entails; that there is intense fear of uncertainty and the unknown; and that all of this anxiety, and the actions of parents that result from it, are heavily socially policed.

Caroline was clearly conscious of risk, as can been seen in her fears about what may happen to her six- and seven-year-old daughters if they were to walk down their suburban street without supervision:

> It wouldn't even enter our heads at the moment to let the girls go out in the front. Where, you know, anyone can pass by, or certainly not if we weren't keeping an eye on them… I still see them as being just far too little for that. In very recent times, I'm talking just literally in the last couple of weeks, we've started to let Caitlin walk round to my dad's house. But it is just round the corner. There's literally one tiny wee bit where she's out of sight of both of us. But, that's a… huge thing for me. I find that quite hard. But, I'm aware that I need to let her learn a little bit of independence.

Caroline (49; SIMD 1; two mid age daughters, one with autism, one adult daughter, currently unemployed though starting university soon)

Caroline's comment came as part of a description of her neighbourhood where she says:

> [E]veryone certainly in this [immediate neighbourhood] are of quite similar mind-sets… There's a couple of families at the other end who have children around about Caitlin's age… we don't know them terribly well. They seem to be slightly different, they're a Polish family. But, their children, just as an example ... you'll see them wandering up and down out the front … at nine or ten o'clock at night.
>
> Caroline (49; SIMD 1; two mid age daughters, one with autism, one adult daughter, currently unemployed though starting university soon)

In Caroline's description of her neighbourhood, she covered and seemingly endorsed, several elements of Lee's risk consciousness perspective, a foundation of their examination of paranoid parenting, parental determinism and contemporary Anglo-American parenting culture. The crux of parental determinism though, is perhaps more about direct harm to children (and society) coming from parental action (or inaction). It is interesting then that Caroline's fear of harms from society was couched in a fear of her protectiveness causing harm: "But, that's a… that's a huge thing for me. I find that quite hard. But, I'm aware that I need to let her learn a little bit of independence". Caroline later argues that parents trying to protect their children from external harms, if done in the wrong way, can be harmful to children in itself:

> I've known parents who have been incredibly controlling over every minutiae of their child's lives and in my experience what happens is that they are the ones who are likely to get themselves into trouble when they're teenagers or whatever because they have that slight rebellion. I think if you… allow your child to have some autonomy and have some discussion about why you're doing things. People can be terribly dictatorial and I think that very much shapes who you are.
>
> Caroline (49; SIMD 1; two mid age daughters, one with autism, one adult daughter, currently unemployed though starting university soon)

My interpretation of Caroline's statements is that she does think that she and other parents should try and control against external harms on their children, but that this must be done in particular ways, otherwise parents risk their actions harming their child, their relationship with their child, and possibly their child's relationship with society (so therefore the future of society). Caroline seemed to argue that the way to protect her children from external harm, while not inadvertently causing harm in the process, is to explain why she is taking these actions, allowing her children a knowing independence. Caroline's comments, I argue, show a convoluted, cyclic dynamic between the adult individual, the child individual and the external, social world, all the time concerned with risk of harm. There is concern about harms from the outside inflicted on the child, which

the adult (parent) must control for, conscious and concerned that this controlling could be harmful in itself for the child and possibly society. This is mitigated by teaching the child about the harms of the outside, in the hope that the child becomes similarly concerned about these harms and so acts in ways which avoid harm to themselves and therefore society. Caroline's complex arguments are of direct relevance to previously presented literature in parenting culture studies, which is why I have quoted her so heavily in this section. While other mothers also talked about risk, they did not go in to as much detail as Caroline or discuss this dynamic between harms from and to society. The majority of the other mothers had very young children, and Caroline was unusual in having an adult daughter and mid-aged children. Perhaps the ages of her children, and their relative independence (compared to babies) required her to reflect more on their interactions with people outside the home.

There were other mothers who referenced risk of harm to children and society. Aroofa shared some similar thoughts to Caroline, without making such an explicit link to harm coming to children through parents' controlling behaviour:

> I have realised is one should never, a parent should never impose his, his or her desires on children … So, like as a parent you should be, you know, very tolerant related to what profession your baby is choosing when he is becoming an adult ... there shouldn't be any strictness related to how the child is behaving in front of the others. Okay, everyone wants their own child to be…to be decent in public but in Pakistan I've seen that parents are very obsessed with that. They want them to be extremely decent or extremely sophisticated which is, you know, a child cannot.
>
> Aroofa (26; SIMD 1; one baby son; U; PhD student; from Pakistan)

In Iona's recalled experiences from her own childhood, she produces an argument somewhat reminiscent of the biblical phrase "the sins of the Father are visited on the children", which evaluated risk of harm to her daughter from common accidents and her own fear prompted actions:

> But if she's running aboot and things, I know she could fall over and she might get a wee bump, but she's gonna be fine, and I'll let her do it, 'cause like in my childhood it was quite like, if like your friends or something come to the door, 'oh no, oh no, don't go out,' like we can't open the door, 'cause like my mum had maybe been sleeping and things, and she's not, the house is a total mess or like, 'oh, you can't do that, like, have someone over or...' I think basically just everything is a big fear. So like nothing is safe at all. And then if you grow up like that, then you grow to be terrified of everything when you're an adult. So I think, and I've read that as well somewhere, like whatever fears you have, you shouldn't put it on your children.
>
> Iona (21; SIMD 2; one baby daughter; studying for university degree)

I argue that though not explicit, in many of these statements there is a suggestion that harms to children through parental action may impact society. Some mothers did seem to endorse this idea directly. Catriona and Julie, a couple, mentioned this as a motivation for having children:

> Catriona- I think what we said was "diluting the shit people". That's the honest answer to that. (laughs) Because your brother was being so horrible to your parents at that point…
>
> Julie- Yeah, and he's got three. So we had to redress the balance a little bit. But yeah, it was almost like if we took kinda the decision not to have a child you were then letting the folk who were just mindlessly producing kids produce the next generation.
>
> Catriona- We were probably slightly arrogantly assume that we would produce somebody that was gonna be a very valuable member of society, make a massive contribution and be completely worthwhile. (laughs)
>
> Catriona (mid 30s; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; U; psychologist)
>
> Julie (mid 30s; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; U; police officer)

Caroline explicitly endorsed the idea that parental practices are causally associated with harming society, though argued that this is a view held by her and just a few others, not by society generally. This is at odds with the view of many parenting culture theorists that intense social and policy interest in parenting is due to a perception of the importance of parenting to the future of society.

> I don't believe that there is any value placed on raising decent children, that are going to be our future… I was speaking to a mum, one of the girls from the dance club… she says that she feels very pressured by society [to go into employment] and feels that she wants to be there for her little girl until she's a good bit older… I said to her, "Well, in actual fact, I think that what you're doing is much more valuable because your wee one needs you." And, if you're there and she has that solid base, she'll become a much more confident adult, and be able to be much more self-sufficient … the chances are she'll then go on to be a much more productive member of society… If she's not there, and that wee one has to deal with that lack of security, that lack of stability, there is a far greater chance that she will then ultimately continue to need support and help, which adds to the pressure of society in general
>
> Caroline (49; SIMD 1; two mid age daughters, one with autism, one adult daughter, currently unemployed though starting university soon)

Although in contrast to Furedi (2008) and Lee et al's (2014) arguments that paranoid parenting and parental determinism is about society viewing parenting as important for the future of society, Caroline's statements do seem to resonate with Hays' notion of intensive

mothering. Hays' (1996, page 5) intensive mothering is foregrounded with her interest in the "more" of mothering:

> [M]odern American mothers do much more than simply feed, change, and shelter the child... It is that "more" with which I am here concerned… Why do many professional-class employed women seem to find it necessary to take the kids to swimming and judo and dancing and tumbling classes, not to mention orthodontists and psychiatrists and attention-deficit specialists?

Although there are exceptions, particularly in discussion of neurodevelopment and brain training, much of the discussion of parental determinism in *Parenting Culture Studies*, about parental action shaping children and society, it is usually framed around an idea of negative consequences, of risk of harm. In Hays' intensive mothering and the "more" of parenting practices, there is arguably more of a lean towards parental labour working towards positive, better outcomes, rather than avoiding negative ones. It is this aspiration for better outcomes that I am calling potentiality.

My interpretation of when policy makers talk of a child reaching their potential, it is about the child not being disrupted from achieving some sort of predestined future, so it is actually about avoidance of risk of harm, really. Taussig et al's (2013) theorisation of potentiality is about something different, and it is this notion of 'something different' that I mean to apply to considerations of parenting practices. Potential, in the sense that Taussig talks about is transformational- it is about a different, better, future. There were instances where mothers referenced working towards a better, different future for their child:

> [A] parent could tell, okay my child has a natural tendency or an ability towards this thing, and they enjoy doing this thing, and then you can, you know, kind of encourage that…And I think …everybody has some like innate ability within them. And …some people find out what that ability is, and some people don't. Unfortunately. And some, the people that do, they're very lucky. You know, and then they can… hone in on that skill at a very early age, they can build that, and then they can go forward, and they can hopefully be some kind of, you know, productive contributor to society.
>
> Fadhila (37; SIMD 5; one baby son, one mid age son, one mid age daughter, U, auditor, from USA and Pakistan)

There is also an indication that Fadhila thinks that this would be beneficial for society, though perhaps not in a truly transformational sense.

4.4 Individuality and Governmentality

There were several instances where mothers talked about how children were individuals, with differing needs:

> Unless you're living it, you don't actually know what it involves, and every child is different. So, I think, I think that's the difficulty with autism, because every child is unique, and they are different. It comes across differently in different people, so.

Angela (39; SIMD 2; two mid aged sons, both with behavioural conditions; U; works for parenting organisation)

> I just think everybody's different, and everybody does things differently, what works for one person may not work for another.

Caroline (49; SIMD 1; two mid age daughters, one with autism, one adult daughter, currently unemployed though starting university soon)

> I think, you know, everybody's kind of got their own opinion with things as well, so and, you know, everybody's baby's different as well.

Gillian (42; SIMD 6; one baby son; U; works for NHS in social role)

The sentiment that "everybody is different" was repeated in interviews and on online forum discussions. It could be argued that this fits with an ethos of child centred 'intensive mothering'.

Different to this are conceptualisations of individualised parenting. These conceptualisations fit in with notions of the privatisation of parenting (as described Bristow, 2014, page 103). A context of individual responsibility and privatised parenting, argues Wall (2004, cited MacVarish, 2014, page 180), is a context where governments don't have to spend huge amounts of money on welfare or housing or childcare services. Clearly this is aligned to a neoliberal ethos of high individual responsibility and low state care. Wall goes on to argue that "while governments may not be prepared to invest socially in families with children, they are prepared to increase scrutiny and control in an effort to ensure that parents fulfil their individual responsibilities" (Wall, 2004, page 47, cited MacVarish, 2014, page 108).

Over the course of the initial interview, Angela made comments indicating the veracity of Wall's argument, to her experiences. Angela found it difficult to access state support for the care and education of her eldest son. She felt state and social pressure to parent in particular ways, with a threat of punishment or sanctions (in the form of social services

removing her child from her care, and her child not being invited to social events), if her parenting was decided to be lacking.

> [Son] goes to mainstream [school], yeah. He's not really been that supported in that, he's getting more supported when he goes to high school, but he hasnae really been that supported at all, to be honest…
>
> But I think there is a lot of pressure on parents that they need to have X, Y and Z for their children, and they should be doing this and that, and developmentally, and stuff like that. It's the "oh, they're not good enough 'cause they've not reached that milestone, so, oh, we need to get this sorted". So, I think there is a lot of pressure on parents, like: "are you reading to them, are you doing this, are you doing that?" …
>
> And that's the perception that there is, if you don't manage your children, the fear is they'll be taken away, you're labelled a bad mother. And you're seen as a troublemaker, your kids don't get invited to parties and things like that, and that has happened.

Angela (39; SIMD 2; two mid aged sons, both with behavioural conditions; U; works for parenting organisation)

Romagnoli and Wall's research in Canada outlined how intensive mothering ideals were promoted through state interventions aimed at low-income, young mothers which "were experienced as a prescriptive and regulative force in participants' lives" (2012, page 273). I asked Iona, who due to her young age was seen regularly by a Family Nurse Partnership nurse, whether she found the nurse to be prescriptive. Iona argued that the nurse treated her as an individual and allowed Iona to make parenting decisions based on presented evidence, though her main point of comparison was poor experiences with health visitors:

> I think the health visitors are so bossy… and they just act like robots, they don't act like a person. … when my family nurse came and like she supported me and stuff, and it got a lot better that time. 'Cause she was like really caring, she wasn't like, 'you must do this, you must do that.' She was quite like, 'oh, well,' like, 'there's things that show this works, or...'And just like friendly and a nice person, like…
>
> And whenever you meet [health visitors], it all just seems quite rushed, like they're just doing a checklist for everything, and they don't want tae like… they don't know the things that are going on individually for you. … like see your family nurse, they don't mind if your house is messy or something, or if you've had a bad day, whereas … I've heard like people, they've had comments like, 'oh, it's quite messy in there, it's not gonna be safe for the baby.'

Iona (21; SIMD 2; one baby daughter; currently studying for university degree)

It could be argued that though Iona did not find the FNP nurse (a programme focussed on young mothers) to be prescriptive, she did find other state services (not specifically aimed at young mothers) prescriptive and regulatory.

4.5 Framing

There were a number of ways in which participants framed, or conceptualised, various groups which are of relevance to discussions of parental determinism. Framings of the most relevant groups: children, parents and society are examined in this section.

4.5.1 Children

There was a frequently expressed conceptualisation of children as cherished, and vulnerable.

> I couldn't walk away and leave him at all, just, 'cause you just can't, you know? That's the thing, they're so tiny and so helpless and anything could happen, so, yeah, I think you don't realise just how much this wee person's gonna be attached to you all the time
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; works in university administrator)

This was particularly seen in online forum discussions about trying to conceive. There were also a number of comments on an online forum thread about family size that framed children as fun, in a chaotic, joyful sense. This framing was not found as much in interviews with mothers though there were some references with a similar sentiment:

> On the one hand, … you'd love your house to be absolutely pristine so that you could open the door to anyone and not have to apologise, and then you think, … I mean, this table is absolutely covered in pen marks and paint marks and stains and we talked at a point about putting table covers on it and then I said to Gary, "I don't want to because this is like a, this is like a wee bit of our kids' history."
>
> Caroline (49; SIMD 1; two mid age daughters, one with autism, one adult daughter, currently unemployed though starting university soon)

When talking of their own children, some of the mothers did so in ways which separated them from other, 'normal' children, sometimes as they felt their own children were more advanced:

> [Daughter] was nine months old when she started talking. And, you know, she was like walking when she was like ten months old, and she was… she was very advanced and, you know, she has a massive vocabulary… And she was not challenged enough, … and at a very young age, then, my husband and I, we decided to move her over to … a private school. … if she is able to go beyond what the other kids can do, then she should be allowed to learn that.
>
> Fadhila (37; SIMD 5; one baby son, one mid age son, one mid age daughter, U, auditor, from USA and Pakistan)

In instances where their child was found to be 'behind' other children, mothers (including Stacey and Madhuri) presented rationales for why this might be:

> So, that is something earlier I used to feel pressure, that my baby, that if she is not doing that … But then, I later realised that there is one major difference among other babies and mine, that she is a premature baby. So, she is running two months ahead of everybody
>
> Madhuri (early 30s; SIMD 5; one baby daughter; U; previously worked in HR; from India)

For Madhuri, comparison between her child and others is dependent on understandings of age. For other mothers too, age was important to conceptualisations of children and childhood. Discussions on online forums included arguments that only new-born babies should be rocked to sleep and the specific ages of babies for whom dummies were permissible or suitable. There was also discussion that four years old was too early to start school, particularly if there was anything other than a play-based curriculum, something echoed somewhat by Fadhila who moved her apparently academically advanced daughter to a private school: "I'm still battling in my mind, like is it really that important at such young age, when she's six years old?". There is somewhat of an idea that there are perceptions of when a young child should do things, to fit in with the timelines of other children or societal norms (like going to school), but concern that it might cause harm if this time is not right for their child individually.

> We want to try and … see what happens when it happens. Like organically, if, you know, with the whole potty-training thing, like, when that comes along. I don't think we're going to say, "right, okay, here's the age, and we have to do it now". You know, here's the recommended age. I think we'll just try and do it when he's ready.
>
> Rebecca (30s; SIMD 5; one baby son; U; hospitality trainer)

There often seemed to be a sense of anxiety about wanting their children to meet certain milestones, so as to be normal, while a fear that doing things too early may be harmful. In writing about neurodevelopment, MacVarish (2014) critiqued the concept of critical periods (periods in young children's life when they should experience certain things otherwise their brains will be harmed) as exaggerated and scaremongering. Macvarish detailed how brain scans of severely neglected children were used in government policy to promote the importance of early years care and parenting interventions. This was with the implication that insufficient parenting, at specific times, has severe detrimental effects for children and society. It was striking then that not only was the idea of critical periods

mentioned by some mothers, one person, Alison, referenced the concept in relation to studies of severely neglected children in exactly the way MacVarish had outlined:

> [T]he comments [on a Facebook group] sometimes will just, they will blow your mind, because people will say, "If you… ever leave your baby to cry, then he's gonna end up like one of those poor wee babies in one of Ceausescu's Romanian orphanages" … "Where the babies don't cry because they know that no one cares and that no one is gonna come and get them, and is that what you want for your baby?"
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; works in university administrator)

The authors of *Parenting Culture Studies* linked parental and infant determinism with a rise in cultural significance of psy-professions, starting with the popularisation of Freud's theories, and moving on to Bowlby's work on attachment. Sinead, who works in child mental health, reflected on the significance of her studies in "the psy-professions" to her mothering practices:

> I think, 'cause like I just finished my doctorate shortly before I became pregnant with him, I think that was all still really fresh, and I think in almost quite a conscious way, I think that's influenced me a lot, 'cause you know, you just spent three years just thinking about what shapes a person and, you know, it's a new person to shape.
>
> Sinead (30s; SIMD 6; one baby son; U (doctorate); paediatric mental health practitioner; from Ireland)

Sinead acknowledged that her immediate social circle is heavily influenced by psychology, and she seemed to perceive some of the thinking aligned to critical periods as extreme:

> [The people she is friends with on Facebook are] a very selective group … because a lot of them I know through work and through study, these are like super intense psychologists and everything's about attachment and you know, every other parent's a monster and very focused on like early childhood trauma and … they're kind of like intense.
>
> Sinead (30s; SIMD 6; one baby son; U (doctorate); paediatric mental health practitioner; from Ireland)

There were some contradictions in conceptualisations of older children, specifically, when they might be old enough to have some kind of autonomy and responsibility. Rebecca, who earlier talked about being led by her son in terms of timings for things like potty training, implied that when her son was 18 years old, he would be able to make his own decisions and she would be absolved of responsibility for him: "I'm going to be raising this child 'til he's eighteen, and he can sort of make his own decisions". Shona was guided by her own

experiences of being an 18-year-old when thinking of her relationship with her son when he is 18:

> He'll be getting encouraged to move out of home quickly. ... 'Cause yeah like I left home when I was 18, like and I just… and I think that was a good thing to do, so… [he] should do the same.
>
> Shona (34; SIMD 9; one baby son; U; scientist)

Though for others, childhood and parental involvement seemed to stretch well beyond a child's 18th birthday:

> You don't realise how… [being a mother is] a twenty-four-hour job that… you can't even retire from. You're 60 years old, and you're 80 years old … 'til the moment that you die, you will be a mother, you know? Whether your child is near you or not.
>
> Fadhila (37; SIMD 5; one baby son, one mid age son, one mid age daughter, U, auditor, from USA and Pakistan)

In some ways, it is obvious that age should be key to conceptualisations of children; childhood, as a category, is one defined by youth. More complex though are links to temporality; to considerations of age in the past, present and future, and what that means to how mothers think of their children. There were references, both online and in interviews, to wanting to do certain things or avoiding other things, with reference to some kind of future reckoning from their adult child.

> So you want to do things that keeps them entertained and it's fun for them … and it's making memories with them as well. You know, so they've got memories of, "Oh, we had a great childhood," you know
>
> Stacey (38; SIMD 3; one mid aged son who has autism; unemployed- left job in payroll due to stress of caring for son)

> When I was pregnant, I said, "I'm not going to put him on social media, I'm going to let him grow up and make his own choices", if he wants to be on the internet. And then, when I had him, I thought actually ... it might be a good way to meet mums … I completely went against my morals, and I set up an Instagram page with him
>
> Rebecca (30s; SIMD 5; one baby son; U; hospitality trainer)

Posts on online parenting forums echoed Rebecca's concerns about posting images of their children online due to fear of future reckoning when her child is older. It is interesting that Rebecca changed her mind about that policy when her child was actually born. Future reckoning, for some, is seemingly a motivator, or inhibitor, for current behaviour. I argue

that this is aligned to the causality aspect of parental determinism, but in a disjointed way, involving imagining their child an adult, capable of decisions and evaluation in the same way that they currently are, and therefore presumably not too adversely affected by parental action. This requires imagination of their child as an adult, based only on their current frame of reference: of their values in the present, shaped by their memories of the past. Some spoke of how they struggled with this: "It's funny, it's hard to think about what we'll do when he's not that age yet, I suppose" (Rebecca); "I still can't imagine him like being a toddler, never mind an adult" (Shona). And others referenced their own experiences of being parented: "[I] think [parents are] the kinda biggest influence [on parenting aspirations] 'cause you appreciate what they've given you" (Julie).

There was also some acknowledgement of the difficulties of using memories of childhood experiences to shape adult behaviours:

> I think I'm probably quite a different parent, than my parents. But, yeah, I can't fully remember how they did parent.
>
> Gillian (42; SIMD 6; one baby son; U; works for NHS in social role)

4.5.2 Society

Mothers both online and in interviews discussed conceptualisations of society, with reference to parenting, in various ways. Following on from this last section on framing of children, the first conceptualisation is also to do with temporality. There was discussion of how society is different now than it has been. Several mothers (Fadhila, Lauren, Julie and Catriona, Sarah, Shona) argued that different things were expected of parents in the past than would be acceptable now, a sentiment exemplified by Gillian's comment:

> I suppose being a child in the seventies is a wee bit different as well. Like, you know, you know, my parents were both smokers, like and they didn't stop smoking while I was in the house, and that's not something like we would—well, neither of us smoke anyway, but… They also like, I suppose nutrition wasn't as big a deal there and I needed teeth out when I was quite young
>
> Gillian (42; SIMD 6; one baby son; U; works for NHS in social role)

It was common among interviewees to think that the methods used by their own mothers would no longer be seen as appropriate today, and arguable, I think, that the methods they framed as appropriate today are much more aligned to intensive mothering ideals of being expert guided and child centred. There was also a sense of people in the past being less sensitive to potential risks to children. On online forums, particularly on a thread about perceptions of roles for mothers and fathers, there were repeated references to changes

across society. Posters criticised some of these changes as being politically correct, ridiculous, and overly sensitive.

Another aspect of time-related social changes mentioned in online discussions were differences in family make up. Posters argued that due to advances in reproductive technologies, women were able to have children at older ages, and also many women who would not otherwise be able to conceive, now can. One poster argued that the availability of contraception means that women no longer go on having children until menopause and can choose how many children they want. There was also argument that for social reasons, it is more common for women to have children when they are older, than in previous times. This idea was echoed by one of the interviewees:

> I hope we're not too old. Because my husband's parents were kind of older parents and he said he used to be quite embarrassed when he got to a certain age, 'cause his parents were these like old, grey people. But anyway, I think there's a lot more of that now.

Annalie (late 30s/ early 40s; SIMD 5; one baby daughter; classical musician; from South Africa)

Posts on online forums argued that due to the internet, there were new dangers for children. This seems to be mainly related to the idea that it exposes children to paedophiles. As previously mentioned, Lee's (2014) distillation of a 'culture of risk consciousness' includes the idea that society is dangerous for children; and Bristow's (2014) conceptualisation of the privatisation of parenting, posits that interaction between children and adults in society is to be avoided. The posters' fear of paedophiles is aligned to both risk consciousness and the privatisation of parenting. However, there was not really much discussion of this by interviewees, with the exception of Caroline (who does not mention paedophiles explicitly, but rather a general fear of strangers):

> Our girls are allowed to go out in the back area … there's sort of in the middle section of two blocks of flats over there, there's a huge high gate, which it stays locked at all times. … So, it means that we can be fairly confident that if the girls go out to play there, they're quite safe, 'cause nobody has access to it, it's all locked because we know the majority of the people in the street now, you'll know that they'll be kind of keeping an eye out or whatever. It wouldn't even enter our heads at the moment to let the girls go out in the front. Where, you know, anyone can pass by, or certainly not if we weren't keeping an eye on them.

Caroline (49; SIMD 1; two mid age daughters, one with autism, one adult daughter, currently unemployed though starting university soon)

It seems that Caroline is fearful of her children being on the street, where "anyone can pass by", but reassured by the idea that neighbours will be "keeping an eye out" for her children

in an area with limited access. I find this comment from Caroline interesting for its distinction between semi-known and unknown adults in society; she is simultaneously agreeing with Lee and Bristow in her fear of strangers, while engaging with some form of community involvement in childcare.

Both Lee and Bristow's arguments reference an idea that there is a push for a separation between the worlds of children and adults, largely for the protection of children. For some interviewees, a separation at bedtime was for maternal benefit:

> Bedtime is very big … that's just my own thing, I feel that I need my sanity, so the kids have to be in bed at eight o'clock. That's just the only thing that I insist on.
>
> Fadhila (37; SIMD 5; one baby son, one mid age son, one mid age daughter, U, auditor, from USA and Pakistan)

> I never wanted to like co-sleep with him and just because … I kind of just I like my own space. … But, it just, from the word go, it just never felt like good for me, and it felt like a really important boundary that I wanted to maintain.
>
> Sinead (30s; SIMD 6; one baby son; U (doctorate); paediatric mental health practitioner; from Ireland)

Some of the interviewees had experiences where they argued that a lack of parental authority and guidance and a reversal of child- adult roles had been particularly harmful:

> I was brought up in quite a like, not like the worst, but like not very great, to be honest, because obviously like my mum, she's got bipolar disorder. So it was quite like, you kind of switched roles, because it's like… you become the parent and they're the child, because like some days they're not getting up out of bed, or some days they're like… won't do anything at all, won't get out of bed for like three weeks, even a month. Won't like go and like go places, and clothes won't get washed, things like that
>
> Iona (21; SIMD 2; one baby daughter; university degree in progress)

4.5.3 Parents

The mothers interviewed contextualised themselves in a culture of endorsement of intensive mothering ideals, in terms of the domains five listed by Hays ("child centred, expert guided, emotionally absorbing, labor intensive, and financially expensive" (1996)). Instances of comments aligned with these ideals have often been mentioned as they have come up in discussion of other topics. Further examples not otherwise cited include: Alison not wanting to impose controlled crying on her son (child centred), Iona following advice from her Family Nurse on breastfeeding (expert guided), Aroofa feeling guilty for working at home in the evenings when she feels her son may want cuddles and her undivided

attention (emotionally absorbing), Fadhila researching and taking her children to an educational day trip every weekend (labour intensive), Lauren arguing that it was important to be seen as buying the best and most expensive things for your child in order to be seen as a good parent (financially expensive).

Much could be written about the various intricacies of the endorsement of these domains, though I argue that further citing of comments from mothers in interviews would repeat earlier work by Hays herself, and others like Wall. Instead, I will focus briefly on an area of divergence. As previously mentioned, Liss et al identified five domains in their typology of intensive mothering: Essentialism ("women are inherently better at parenting than men)"; Fulfilment; Stimulation; Challenging; Child-Centred (Liss et al, 2013, page 621).

Although all of the mothers interviewed (who were in heterosexual relationships) appeared to do more childcare work than their male partners, there was no indication that this was because they thought that they, as women, were better at childcare than their male partners. Instead, reasons for this uneven division of labour were cited as biological (they were breastfeeding and had given birth, involving a hospital stay and physical recuperation), and economic (their partner only had very brief parental leave from his job). They did however indicate that there seemed to be differing social perceptions of what constitutes a 'good father' and a 'good mother':

> I think that, I suppose something you're probably gonna hear a lot, that if a father does the bare minimum for his baby or child then he's Superman, you know? But, there's, these are the things that mums do all day long and they just have to do because no one else is there to do it mostly… Seeing that kinda thing, that yeah, a man with a baby is this wonderful life-affirming sight, you know, and whereas with a woman… A woman with a baby is just pedestrian.
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

With regards to what a 'good mother' is, there were unprompted suggestions from some of the mothers that this was to do with sacrifice, in a way aligned to Wolf's total motherhood ideology:

> Me- What sorts of things do you think a mother would do to be a good mother?
>
> Paige- Well, for me, it's always putting the kid's needs before your own, you know? Like, that's a big one because it's hard to do. But, you know, if you truly want a different life for your kids you'll put theirs before yours
>
> Paige (23; SIMD 1; one baby son (in care of social services); unemployed though volunteers for charity; care leaver)

After prompting in follow up interviews, several of the mothers talked about sacrifice being aligned to an idea of good motherhood:

> Oh your baby definitely comes first straightaway … I have problems, like, with socialising and that, it's so difficult. And although my…my wee boy's got autism, he's really sociable. So he likes to go to birthday parties and out to soft play and that, and I feel uncomfortable, you know, with doing that kind of thing. But I have to think of him. Like, this is best for him. This is what he enjoys doing. So you just have to go and do it, you know. And it is hard, but you just have to push through and do that, you know, to do what's best for you child and to make sure they're happy.

Stacey (38; SIMD 3; one mid aged son who has autism; unemployed- left job in payroll due to stress of caring for son)

For others, the idea of sacrifice as good motherhood was complicated by not being sure what is best for her children, and therefore, what sacrifice to make:

> Like, for me a pure issue I have the now, like, even, like, I was talking about moving forward in to work is, like, the guilt 'cause, like, you feel like you need to be with your kids because they come first or whatever. Like, now I've… graduated fae uni and I got a good result, so I could get, like, a very, like, well paid job… So it's hard finding that balance. Like I think above everything, yeah, your kids always do come first … Like, oh if I start working is that me putting myself first? But then it's like, well you'd be giving them a good financial future for them

Iona (22; SIMD 2; one baby daughter; one baby son, U)

And for Fadhila, pressures of responsibility for various aspects of family life meant that her children were "second priority", though the work she was doing was for her family, including them:

> When I was home with the kids, I had the laundry and make sure the kids are clean, and my mother-in-law is not well, so taking care of her and those things that are supposed to be ... like being the daughter-in-law of the house, making sure we have groceries are in the house, and there are a lot of other pressures on me. And a lot of times, like most of the time, my kids would be, like, second priority, so I just kind of like put them in the highchair and then get on with whatever it is that I need to get done for myself or for my family and for them.

Fadhila (37; SIMD 5; one baby son, one mid age son, one mid age daughter, U, auditor, from USA and Pakistan)

In Fadhila's view, it is not that she is putting herself first, but rather that instead of her parenting being child centred, her priority is on the family as a whole.

One framing of appropriate or good motherhood spoken about by some mothers which can be seen as in resistance to the pressurised notions associated with parental determinism is

the framing of themselves and others as 'good enough mothers'. This concept was coined by the paediatrician and psychoanalyst Winnecott in the 1950s. Winnecott argued that mothers should be "good enough": and that to do so "they should provide a safe environment for the child and satisfy their needs, but not smother the child by never allowing them to take a risk or compelling them to do something for themselves" (Buchanan, 2010). A number of mothers talked about good parenting practices in ways broadly fitting this description:

> In terms of good parenting … I think it probably takes quite a lot to be a "bad" parent, more than anything. I think most people are exactly the parents that their babies need, to be honest with you … they're doing everything out of love for their baby, you know, and in terms of attitudes, I think just thinking about what your specific baby needs to be happy and be healthy, and that's not always a clear cut thing that you can figure out, you know, so I do genuinely think … that probably if your baby is fed and warm and clean then that's a good parent, to be honest. And before I was pregnant, I probably would've said, "Oh…" All manner of airy-fairy stuff about going to baby sign language and things and really trying to develop your baby's cognitive abilities as early as possible and baby wearing, that kinda thing, never putting your baby down, but now I do genuinely think that, if your baby's happy then you're doing a brilliant job.
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

> There's no such thing as the perfect parent, you can only do the best with what you can, when you can do it. So, depending on the situation you'll be the best parent in that situation that you can be, with regards to the skills that you've got. But I think there is a lot of pressure on parents that they need to have X, Y and Z for their children, and they should be doing this and that, and developmentally, and stuff like that. It's the "oh, they're not good enough 'cause they've not reached that milestone, so, oh, we need to get this sorted". So, I think there is a lot of pressure on parents, like: are you reading to them, are you doing this, are you doing that? And I've done the same with both of my kids, and they behave totally differently.
>
> Angela (39; SIMD 2; two mid aged sons, both with behavioural conditions; U; works for parenting organisation)

Interestingly, though Alison and Angela seem to have quite similar opinions about 'good enough' parents, they made other comments about the causality aspect of parental determinism, which were in part opposed. Alison argued that parents were the single most important factor in how children turn out, whereas Angela acknowledged complex social influences and argued for the individuality of children, particularly those with autism. I think it is significant that these comments, with similar sentiments, are framed as a reflection on their own experiences of parenting, and the minutiae of parenting practices, rather than as larger, more philosophical questions.

Comments were made by several mothers in interviews (including Shona, Gillian, Iona and Paige) and in posts on an online thread (about pressure felt from the media to parent in particular ways), which dismissed an idea of a perfect parent. They suggested that parents trying their best, occasionally making mistakes, but broadly providing a loving environment with adequate food, comfort and support, were good parents. They did not use the phrase 'good enough parents', though I interpreted the sentiment to approximate that. However, further reading on Winnecott's 'good enough mother' has complicated my understanding of the term. Colman provides a more detailed summary of Winnecott's theory, arguing that a good enough mother:

> Initially behaves towards a totally dependent infant just how the infant wishes, allowing the infant to feel all-powerful and to maintain the fantasy that the mother is a part of itself, and who later allows the child to abandon this fantasy and separate from her in an orderly way. A mother who is too intrusive (too good) interferes with the child's separation and development of selfhood, and a mother who is too distant (not good enough) generates anxiety in the child; in either case the failure to supply good-enough mothering can disrupt the development of the child's self-concept, and as an adult the ability to form meaningful relationships.
>
> Colman, 2009

This presentation of a good enough mother prescribes an exacting course of action for mothers, with dire long-term consequences for her child if she fails. This understanding of a good enough mother is at odds then with the arguments that if mothers try their best, things will turn out alright. I argue that there is perhaps a colloquial understanding of a good enough parent, which is in resistance to pressured parental determinism, and which is different to Winnecott's original theory. The only person to specifically mention the term good enough parent was Sinead, who had recently completed a doctorate in child psychology:

> I do think about [the long-term consequences of everyday parental action] and I definitely think that I'm putting things in perspective. 'Cause I kind of think about, yeah, things that have been multiple-causation and… you know, I think about this idea of a good enough parent and I think about how I am, obviously, an extremely important influence for him, but you know, there's gonna be school, there's gonna be peer groups, there's gonna be other kind of contexts as he grows up, and yeah, I do think about the consequences, but I try not to let it overwhelm me
>
> Sinead (30s; SIMD 6; one baby son; U (doctorate); paediatric mental health practitioner; from Ireland)

It is not entirely clear from this briefest of mentions what Sinead understands by the term good enough parent; whether she mentions it as a reassurance to herself that she is

probably doing alright as a parent, or if her study of child psychology included an understanding of Winnecott's good enough parent which prescribed a specific course of action she should take. Sinead was also the only person interviewed who used the term determinism, and she did so unprompted:

> Me- Is there anything … that you want to say that we haven't said?
>
> Sinead- The only thing that comes to mind is, I was saying about how, that message was very strong and kind of the attachment parenting stuff. But, actually, kind of the other stuff about, you know, "You must teach your child how to go to sleep and…" The more mainstream, dominant Gina Ford-esque stuff. Like there is actually that determinism is there too. It's all like, you know, "Otherwise your child will be confused," and, "otherwise your child will be unhealthy…" And yeah, I actually probably it's unfair of me to say that it's purely there in the more crunchy, attachment-y stuff, because in that other kind of rigid, put your child on a schedule, kind of lay down the law all the time, they kind of almost suggest that your child will be some kind of delinquent if they're not sleeping twelve hours from three months old kind of thing…
>
> Yeah, and I guess that's where the stress comes from, it's not just about saying, "You're having a massive impact, and what you do now, du, du, du…" It's the fact that different people saying contradictory things, it's like, 'Well… someone's probably wrong, so which one do I…'
>
> Sinead (30s; SIMD 6; one baby son; U (doctorate); paediatric mental health practitioner; from Ireland)

Both of these comments suggest quite high, though nuanced, endorsement of parental determinism, and also how this endorsement balances with her own wellbeing, which is something that will be further discussed in later chapters.

4.6 Analysis

This chapter has detailed mothers' various perceptions and levels of endorsement of parental determinism. There was no outright, complete denial of a causal association between parental action and children's outcomes, but there was varying endorsement, with some mothers seemingly very engaged with the idea that parenting is the single most important factor in shaping a child, and others citing other important factors. At the start of the chapter, I presented a table grouping the mothers interviewed in to categories of endorsement, with eight mothers in the high endorsement group (Alison; Julie and Catriona; Annalie; Lauren; Iona; Paige; Aroofa; Jessica), four in the mixed endorsement group (Rebecca; Sinead; Madhuri; Gillian) and seven in the low endorsement group (Stacey; Caroline; Sarah; Shona; Angela; Jade; Amber). Several factors can be identified which may go some way to explaining mothers' perspectives.

Three of the mothers I grouped in the low endorsement category (Caroline, Stacey and Angela) have children with autism, the only such mothers in the sample, and their children are also several years older than those of other mothers interviewed (in part because most of the other mothers were recruited from groups aimed at toddlers and their parents). Both these factors seem significant. The experience of parenting children who perhaps did not behave in response to earlier parenting styles in expected ways, and the opportunity over time to reflect on that, and in some cases compare their autistic child to their other children, may have been an influence on how much weight they gave to the influence of parental action.

> I was nineteen when my aunt had her third son, and I was like a second mum to him, you know? So, I was like taking him out to the park and stuff like that, you know? … I thought that's how it would be, and my husband and I we've been trying for a while to have a child … And, so by the time we had him, I was just so over the moon and delighted. But then I started to notice the behaviour as he was getting older and we thought this was something going on here

Stacey (38; SIMD 3; one mid aged son who has autism; unemployed- left job in payroll due to stress of caring for son)

> I know that some parents have been told that they're just bad parents, and they've no control over their kids, when actually they can control other children that they've got that aren't on the spectrum. So it's like, well those two are behaving, and they are neurotypical, but this one isn't, so actually that shows that it's not my parenting at all, it's actually the child, and what's going on for the child.

Angela (39; SIMD 2; two mid aged sons, both with behavioural conditions; U; works for parenting organisation)

A key factor four of the eight mothers grouped as highly endorsing parental determinism had in common is that Alison, Annalie, Iona and Paige all talked about the parenting that they experienced as children as being lacking in some way. Most drew direct connections between the parenting they received and the way they wanted to parent in terms of relevance to childhood outcomes, a view articulated quite precisely by Alison:

> I think, something that has informed me a lot is the fact that I've had issues with anxiety for quite a long time. And when I read that leaving a baby to cry causes cortisol spikes, it makes me think, 'If I can do anything to avoid him feeling the way that I have felt at some points in my life, then I'm gonna do that.' And, you know, my mum will say things to me like, "We left you to cry for a bit, and you turned out okay." And, I'm like, "Did I?" You know? "Do you think so?" And, I suppose I did in many ways, but… But, I'm very, very aware that I would like him to be emotionally a lot more light-hearted and peaceful than I've been.

Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

Feeling that they were not parented in the right way led these mothers to be either unable or unwilling to approach their parents for guidance on parenting which means that they sought guidance from other sources, including professionals and the media, which will be a focus of analysis in the next chapter.

In Val Gillies' book *Marginalised Mothers*, she argued that the accounts presented in the book "challenge middle class individualist values, showing how mothering on the margins is characterised by a pressure to raise children who fit in, rather than stand out" (Gillies, 2006, page 17). Thinking about risk and potentiality with Gillies' arguments in mind, one might assume a class divide along the line between risk and potentiality might be observed- that the marginalised mothers were aspiring to normality, so not harming their children, and that the more middle-class mothers were aspiring to brilliance, in a way aligned to transformative potentiality. In discussion of aspiration, there was some allusion to brilliance, albeit sometimes a bit tongue in cheek. Generally though, most of the aspirations cited were seemingly mundane, with similar sentiments expressed by more middle class and marginalised mothers. They wanted their children to be happy and fulfilled, and nice people.

> [I want our daughter to be] Just happy really, I think is the main thing … We were probably slightly arrogantly assum[ing] that we would produce somebody that was gonna be a very valuable member of society, make a massive contribution and be completely worthwhile.
>
> Catriona (mid 30s; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; U; psychologist)

> I hope she's happy and I hope we make her happy.
>
> Annalie (late 30s/ early 40s; SIMD 5; one baby daughter; classical musician; from South Africa)

> I'd like him to be empathic, I'd like him to… Yeah, I guess I don't know, it's a bit of a buzz word, but like emotional intelligence
>
> Sinead (30s; SIMD 6; one baby son; U (doctorate); paediatric mental health practitioner; from Ireland)

> I don't have set like, you know, "I want him to be a doctor…" or, "I want him to be this…" Like, maybe just kind of grow into what, what kind of suits him as well.
>
> Gillian (42; SIMD 6; one baby son; U; works for NHS in social role)

> I don't mind what she does … I would hope for her to be like fantastically good at everything, but even if she's not like, just like I think like the personality of a person matters more than like whatever, how clever they are.
>
> Iona (21; SIMD 2; one baby daughter; currently studying for university degree)

I used a quote earlier from Fadhila in relation to transformative potentiality. Unlike many of the mothers, her aspirations for her children were overtly related to education and careers, which she linked to the significance placed on these things during her own upbringing:

> Me: Do you have any like particular aspirations for your own children?
>
> Fadhila: I do ... because I put so much effort into my own… you know, like as far as my side of the family, at least my sister is a doctor. She's married to a doctor. My older brother is an actuary, you know, he's married to a… she's a director in her company. And then there's me, and I'm a certified auditor. My younger brother works for [social media company] … that's always been… education is very important

Fadhila (37; SIMD 5; one baby son, one mid age son, one mid age daughter, U, auditor, from USA and Pakistan)

Many of the mothers, when asked about aspirations for their children, did mention wanting them to go to university, but almost all of them did so with a caveat that it was not a 'be all and end all', that they wanted them to be happy most of all. However, Madhuri seemed quite emphatic about the importance of education for the potential for a better life:

> So, like my biggest concern is like, you know, she should be first of all, be social, that I don't want that she should be all the time home and just cranky and just revolving around two or three people. So, I want her to be, you know, quite educated person in that sense, so I'll just try to make that she could get a good education and try to get something. If she needs any extracurricular activities to be involved in, so I'll be really helping her in that case. … So, like it's never been predicted what's gonna happen. But, yes, we'll go with the flow, but we—what we dream for her to give her a better life in that way, like whatever she wants we'll just try to fulfil her dreams.

Madhuri (early 30s; SIMD 5; one baby daughter; U; unemployed though professional background in HR; originally from India)

All but three of the mothers I spoke to were white. Madhuri is from India, Aroofa is from Pakistan and Fadhila lived most of her life in the US, though has spent some time in Pakistan, where her parents are from. Aroofa moved to the UK to study for a PhD, Madhuri moved because her husband got a UK based job and Fadhila moved to marry her British husband, whom she met in Pakistan. The overall sample of this study is small, and this subsection of women of colour is even smaller, though I argue it is noteworthy that two of the non-white mothers, both immigrants, seemed to hold some of the strongest aspirations around educational achievement for their children. Jiménez and Horowitz (2013, page 849) carried out research in the US with "third-plus generation (U.S.-born

individuals of U.S.-born parents)" immigrant people about educational achievement. They found:

> The resulting ethnoracial encoding of academic achievement constructs whiteness as having lesser-than status. Asianness stands for high-achievement, hard work, and success; whiteness, in contrast, represents low-achievement, laziness, and academic mediocrity. … Our findings call into question the position that treats the third-plus generation, especially whites, as the benchmark population that sets achievement norms and to which all other populations adjust.
>
> Jiménez and Horowitz, 2013, page 849

None of the women of colour I spoke to were born in the UK and neither were their parents; their experience of immigration is different, and more direct than those in Jiménez and Horowitz's study. They will have had to be familiar with the British government's stipulations for immigration, which include restrictions around salary and value to the work force. They may also not have been eligible to support from the state. They had experiences of governmentality and financial negotiations with the state in different ways to most of the other mothers in the sample. Earlier research, also from the US, suggested class was more important to aspiration than race, and therefore more aligned to Gillies' work:

> Middle-class parents engage in concerted cultivation by attempting to foster children's talents through organized leisure activities and extensive reasoning. Working-class and poor parents engage in the accomplishment of natural growth, providing the conditions under which children can grow but leaving leisure activities to children them- selves. These parents also use directives rather than reasoning. Middle-class children, both white and black, gain an emerging sense of entitlement from their family life. Race had much less impact than social class.
>
> Lareau, 2002, page 747

It is important to note that Lareau's study involved comparisons between white and Black, not Asian populations, and that immigration history was not a factor in this work. Although much writing on contemporary parenting cultures group the US and the UK as having similar prevalent ideologies, there are clearly some important cultural differences between the UK and the US. These differences, particularly around race, immigration, class and state support, have been shaped by differing histories of slavery, colonialism, imperialism, government and geographical location. Fadhila suggested that there is different cultural significance given to aspiration in the US and the UK:

> So it's a very different kind of mindset, and I think because of that, my [British] husband and I have always been on opposite sides. … you know, in the States, it's very big, a five year plan, "what is your five year plan?" … Over here there's

> nothing like that … And the people are just kind of… at least, from what my exposure has been, people … just getting on with it. You know, okay, just… deal with it one day at a time kind of thing. But I'm… because of being from that culture, but also in general, I'm kind of a planner. I like to plan for things. So it's … something that I've had to deal with, and it's been very difficult for me to deal with from the beginning, to not know where we are headed. But especially with education of my children, not knowing what's gonna happen in the next few years, you know?
>
> Fadhila (37; SIMD 5; one baby son, one mid age son, one mid age daughter, U, auditor, from USA and Pakistan)

Aroofa, the only other woman of colour in the sample talked of aspirations for her child in quite different ways than Fadhila and Madhuri, trying to reject cultural expectations observed in Pakistan in favour of more individualist, child focussed ideals perceived in the UK:

> [A] parent should never impose his, his or her desires on children. … for instance, if I'm forcing my son that, "okay, I want to see you as a doctor," "I want to see you as an engineer," or like if you're mother or father was a PhD so you have to follow this. But the thing is that there should be a realisation that every baby is different. … when I came to the UK I realised that you should give your child freedom from the very, from a very early age. Okay, you should keep an eye on him. … [I'll] give you a comparison from Pakistan to the UK, … there shouldn't be any pressure to impose your ideas on your child. There shouldn't be any impression, like there shouldn't be any strictness related to how the child is behaving in front of the others. Okay, everyone wants their own child to be…to be decent in public but in Pakistan I've seen that parents are very obsessed with that. They want them to be extremely decent or extremely sophisticated which is, you know, a child cannot.
>
> Aroofa (26; SIMD 1; one baby son; U; current PhD student; from Pakistan)

I cannot really account for this apparent disparity between Aroofa and Fadhila and Madhuri. It is possible that differences in life experiences are more significant than similarities in immigration and ethnicity; it is also possible that immigration and race are not particularly important to views on aspiration; and it is of course possible that the interviews, and my perceptions of them, do not fully capture the sentiment, nuance or range of the participant's views.

Surveillance of parenting practices by people encountered socially was an area of interest from early on in this project, in part because of discussions of this on online parenting forums read during scoping searches. This was mentioned by some spontaneously in initial interviews:

> If you're out and ... a kid's being rude or a kid's running around or, you know, I think there's definitely a judgement on the parents. Or, you know, at least perceived

> to be. ... [I]f I'm out and he's crying in his pram I feel like people are probably thinking, you know, 'There's something wrong with that child.' And, 'She's not…' You know, 'She's not dealing with it.'
>
> Lauren (36; SIMD 4; one baby son; U; museum professional)

I had wondered if mothers might feel under particular social scrutiny if perhaps they were younger or in some other way socially marginalised and so in follow up interviews I tried to illicit more detailed views on this. However, the video shown at the start of interviews and related questions prompted relatively similar accounts of social surveillance:

> I've been judged all the time. Because my son's got autism I feel as if I'm judged on his behaviour all the time. So when he has sensory meltdown, people see that as bad behaviour.
>
> Angela (39; SIMD 2; two mid aged sons, both with behavioural conditions; U; works for parenting organisation)

> I'm trying to think what else kind of featured in the video that stood out to me…yeah, just ... the social pressure of being judged. I still feel…so my wee one is ten months old and I stopped feeding when she was seven months, and my goal was always six months. … But even now, so now we buy formula, because she's going to be on formula until she's one, and I still feel a little bit like wondering if I'm being judged in the supermarket buying it.
>
> Elizabeth (29; SIMD 6; two baby daughters; U; folk musician)

> I mean, hallelujah, I've just started working and I have three kids of seven, four and one, so you can imagine the kind of judgement that I, I feel
>
> Fadhila (37; SIMD 5; one baby son, one mid age son, one mid age daughter, U, auditor, from USA and Pakistan)

> But you can't get your child in to trouble without everyone watching you, that's the thing. Like even minimal trouble, like [son] will be constantly grabbing at things and I'll eventually snap like "we're going to just leave" and you can turn round and there'll be like twenty different eyes on you, staring, because you've raised your voice to your child.
>
> Jade (mid 20s; SIMD 1; one mid age son, two stepchildren, one mid age, one teenage; unemployed)

This perhaps suggests a widespread feeling of social scrutiny, experienced by mothers of various social groups, supporting Lee et al and Furedi's assertions about intense, indiscriminate social interest in parenting. Also important though is how seemingly effective this video was a prompt for discussion on this issue, which possibly indicates the power of the media in reflecting experience.

[5]

Chapter Five- Influences on Parenting Practices and Identities

5.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is Research Question Two, including two intermediary questions. The chapter initially responds (Section 5.2) to the first core element of Research Question Two: *What do mothers think are the key sources of their beliefs and attitudes on parenting?* To address this, interview and online forum data were analysed and coded around 17 themes.

Although important to acknowledge the range of influences cited by mothers, particular attention is paid to the influence of the media, in line with the overall focus of this project. This focus occupies the remaining sections of this chapter. Section 5.3 responds to (intermediary) Research Question 2a: *What are the main media channels mothers are exposed to?* The section firstly details media types and specific titles mothers cited engaging with, and some discussion of links between social groups or identities and media choices. I then present a summary of the ways in which mothers engaged with these media, differentiating active and passive choice and engagement.

Section 5.4 addresses Research Question 2b: *How do mothers perceive broadcast and social media to represent parenting?* This section references Stuart Hall's distinction between traditional analysis of media representations (being concerned with accurately reflecting reality) and his arguments for considering media representations as constituent of reality.

The final element of Research Question Two, *What impact do mothers think broadcast and social media representations of parenting have on their parenting identities and*

behaviours?, is responded to in the penultimate section of this chapter (5.5). Mothers describe the influence of the media on their own behaviours and contrast this with ways in which they perceive other people being influenced by the media. There is discussion of possible explanations for the apparent disparity between influence on themselves and on others. There is also an examination of mothers' perceptions of media significance more widely. At the end of this section, there is discussion of audience influence on media producers.

5.2 Key Influences on Parenting

In interviews, mothers were asked directly what they thought the main influences on their parenting behaviours, decisions and identities were. Data in this section come from this direct questioning but also from other relevant points in the interviews as well as content on online forums.

A central tenant of Hays' notion of 'intensive mothering' is parenting being expert-guided. This corresponds to Lee's (2014b, pages 28 and 29) arguments that tacit childrearing knowledge is being delegitimised in favour of advice from parenting experts. Influences on parenting cited by mothers in interviews and on online forums ranged across contrasting paradigms of tacit knowledge and expert-guided.

5.2.1 Experiences of Childhood or of Being Parented

A key influence for many mothers on their parenting behaviours was their own experiences of childhood or of being parented. Some mothers interviewed (Julie and Catriona, Rebecca, Madhuri, Lauren, Caroline, Sarah, Aroofa, Angela, Fadhila, Jade and Amber) mentioned wanting to emulate at least elements of the parenting they experienced as a child. An example of this sentiment was expressed by Angela:

> I probably wanted to be like my mum and dad, because I thought they were great parents. My mum's very loving, caring, and had enough time for us, like, she never lost her rag that much with us. And I wanted to be like that.
>
> Angela (39; SIMD 2; two mid aged sons, both with behavioural conditions; U; works for parenting organisation)

Some other mothers (Alison, Annalie, Stacey, Iona, Paige, Sinead and Jessica) were critical of the parenting they experienced, which served as a model of parenting behaviours they talked of wanting to avoid. Stacey spoke at length about this, as is summarised by her statement on parental prioritising:

> I'd always wanted to be a mum and I always knew that my baby would always come first. I would always put my child first no matter what, you know. 'Cause …I don't feel my parents did that. I don't feel like we came first, you know. I think everything else came before us, kind of thing. It was like, just …go and be quiet in the corner really
>
> Stacey (38; SIMD 3; one mid aged son who has autism; unemployed- left job in payroll due to stress of caring for son)

5.2.2 Own Experiences of Parenting and Instincts

On online forums, some posters talked about examples of their previous parenting actions (and perceived success of them) as a guide to future parenting actions (both for themselves and as advice to other forum users).

Sarah referenced media messages about processed food, but prioritised her child's overall wellbeing, using a pragmatic, trial and error approach to feeding her child:

> I would say that I'm just winging it every day … I didn't realise, naïvely until like you start reading about these things how much salt, sugar, and stuff that are in [processed foods] … yesterday I made her chicken wi' courgette and red pepper or something … and she wasn't eating it, and I'm like, "Well, you need to eat something. So, you have a… a sandwich with Philadelphia for your dinner." And, she ate it. So, I'm like, "Well, that's fine because she needs to eat something and she's just trying stuff just now." So, I'm just kinda trying to go with the flow.
>
> Sarah (30s; SIMD 6; one baby daughter; accountancy related field)

Shona and Alison talked of being guided by their instincts:

> I've just kind of done what feels right, like I've sort of followed my instincts. I don't think I really like try to follow anyone
>
> Shona (34; SIMD 9; one baby son; U; scientist)

Gillian and Shona talked of the use of instinct as an alternative to, or rationale for rejection of, external guidance. I suggest that instinct, in many of the ways cited by mothers, is better understood as less of a truly innate sense, and more a form of intersubjective knowledge shaped and influenced by social experiences. So, while these mothers are talking about tacit know-how, this know-how is in some ways learnt and as such, possibly expert-guided. While determining where exactly this knowledge comes from lies beyond the focus of this thesis, I suggest that it is an aggregate of complex social contexts and experiences.

5.2.3 Family

Separate to the influence of their parents when they were children, and accounts of being parented, mothers interviewed talked about influence, assistance and advice from family

members in the present day. For example, Amber described taking cues from her own mother about parenting behaviours:

> I live with my mum as well, so she helps me with a lot of stuff. ... I've had [daughter] two years and she still helps me.
>
> Amber (20; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; unemployed)

Some other mothers referenced relatives' opinions, but they were more critical of the advice or examples given. Lauren, Sarah and Shona all mentioned the availability of advice from their own parents, which they were dismissive of, arguing it was outdated.

> My mum's probably said a couple of times. "Oh, just leave him to cry for a little while. You know, he needs to know you're not going to run to him…" I think there's a bit of like a generation thing maybe, that, you know, I just don't really think that you can spoil a child by going to them
>
> Lauren (36; SIMD 4; one baby son; U; museum professional)

5.2.4 Friends

Paige, who was not in contact with her family, sought influence from social connections who were "like family":

> My boss and stuff, like we're really, really close, and we're, like, kinda family and everything else, and she's got like a son and a daughter, so, she kinda gives me tips on, you know, things … she's a really good influence.
>
> Paige (23; SIMD 1; one baby son (in care of social services); unemployed though volunteers for charity; care leaver)

This contrasts in some ways with Iona who felt she could not approach her own mother for advice so sought guidance from parenting groups. In relation to questions about having people around her who have had children she responded "Not really … basically it's just … us", referring to herself and her partner.

Though not often cited as first as a source of parenting advice, most mothers interviewed mentioned speaking to friends who were mothers about parenting, or reflecting on observations of friends' parenting, to shape or contextualise their own behaviours. Madhuri provided an example of the former:

> My friends in [another country], they all have a babies now … whenever I feel that something is getting wrong, I just give a buzz, and I get a … lot of help
>
> Madhuri (early 30s; SIMD 5; one baby daughter; U; unemployed though professional background in HR; originally from India)

And Annalie provided an example of the latter:

> One of my closest friends here … the way she handles her children … just looking at the way she talks to them. I would like to, hopefully, be patient and not … but that's not always possible
>
> Annalie (late 30s/ early 40s; SIMD 5; one baby daughter; classical musician; from South Africa)

The way Aroofa discussed the influence of her friends appeared a relatively passive process. Her friends posted information about parenting, which Aroofa found useful and did not seem to critique:

> My friendship group are from Pakistan and … are in Canada as well. … We all grew up the same age, so like most of them have become parents with me so the good thing is that they are sharing some stuff related to parenting … I'm not specifically searching for [videos about parenting], but yeah, if it comes on my Facebook wall page … I'm listening to and watching them, yeah.
>
> Aroofa (26; SIMD 1; one baby son; U; current PhD student; from Pakistan)

I argue that a possible reason why Aroofa seems to find videos about parenting posted by her friends helpful and uncritically acceptable is that she has selected, or been grouped with, friends who share a similar outlook both towards parenting and other issues. This sentiment was expressed by Lauren in relation to sharing similar approaches to parenting as those around her:

> When I go to groups locally, I feel like I have a similar approach [to parenting] but at the same time I think similar people go to the same groups so that's a bit of a self-fulfilling prophecy
>
> Lauren (36; SIMD 4; one baby son; U; museum professional)

The importance for some of social contacts by choice, rather than inheritance, was highlighted by Paige, Iona and Lauren. Paige and Iona described the poor parenting they experienced as children, which meant they either could not or did not want to approach their parents for advice, so they sought out advice from friends or parenting groups. Lauren described a generational difference in approach to parenting between herself and her mother and found friends and social contacts of a similar age as herself to have more similar approaches.

5.2.5 Social Norms

In Lauren's description of a generational divide and her comment about the circular relationship between shared approaches to parenting and attendance at particular parenting groups, there are hints towards the influence of social norms. A social norm is "a shared expectation of behaviour that is considered culturally desirable and/or appropriate." (Scott, 2015).

Online forums featured discussion of social norms being influential in consideration of acceptable maternal age and infant feeding choices. In interviews, several mothers referred to social norms, though this was mainly to distinguish an 'other'. Aroofa, Annalie and Fadhila outlined some perceived cultural differences between their country of origin and the UK.

> Afrikaans people tend to be more conservative ... English people not so much
>
> Annalie (late 30s/ early 40s; SIMD 5; one baby daughter; classical musician; from South Africa)

> I think this is kind of an American thing … there's [a] kind of mind [set]… you reach a certain age, graduate, you get a job, you get a house, you get a car, you … get married, and then… two and a half kids … I don't [know] if it's just Glasgow, or if it's Scotland, but [in] the Pakistani community and Muslim community … it's actually considered a good thing for you to be living with your parents
>
> Fadhila (37; SIMD 5; one baby son, one mid age son, one mid age daughter, U, auditor, from USA and Pakistan)

Julie referenced some "mental" things her friend did due to cultural influences but argued that her advice could now be useful as these practices were time limited:

> Our kinda closest friend, [name] who's got the baby, like she comes from a Chinese culture and so a lot of her parenting is like mental. All the superstitions and things. Around the pregnancy and, you know, when the baby was born they couldn't leave the house for forty days. ... And so ... she'd a very different experience. But now that her kid's older and she's sort of got over that sort of stage, she's quite good wi' the advice and things.
>
> Julie (mid 30s; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; U; police officer)

Possibly the reason most mentions of social norms were to do with an 'other' is because descriptions of, or comparisons with, something other are easier to explain or articulate than cultural norms one is surrounded by. Perhaps the interviewees' perceptions of my own cultural context and experience meant that they talked more about things they thought I might not know or already made judgements about.

Lauren was relatively unusual in her specificity of reflections on the complexities of cultural practices, and the influences on her own behaviours:

> I suppose some of it is sort of the people around you and… how you want to… reflect that or, you know, maybe ... other people parenting and you think they're doing a good job so you sort of want to be kind of similar to that.
>
> Lauren (36; SIMD 4; one baby son; U; museum professional)

Caroline talked about social pressures, largely in terms of her resistance to them:

> I'm not, and really never have been one to bow to social pressure, all the way through my own childhood, my own youth, I was always just, just myself, and never gave into peer pressure
>
> Caroline (49; SIMD 1; two mid age daughters, one with autism, one adult daughter, currently unemployed though due to start university soon)

5.2.6 Partner

Most interviews included discussion of whether they shared similar approaches to parenting with their partners. Paige and Amber were the only mothers interviewed who did not have a partner. Most mothers with partners who were asked about it did seem to think they and their partner shared similar views to parenting, though the majority carried out much more childcare activities than their partners. There were some exceptions where their partner's views diverged: Fadhila talked about her aspirations for her children to be focussed around education but her husband's to be more around family and business, and Rebecca's husband was reluctant to allow her to give their child a dummy. There were some online forum posts where mothers had some conflict with their partners about posting pictures of their child on social media. I argue it is unlikely that shared views on parenting with partners being so common is a coincidence. It could be that unconsciously or not, partners were either chosen in part due to shared outlook on issues like parenting, or that over time together, shared views have developed. Although shared attitudes to parenting were common, when asked about influences on their parenting behaviours or sources they would turn to for advice, very few mothers interviewed mentioned their partners. Stacey and Rebecca mentioned that their partners were drivers for the "healthiness" of their infant's diets and Iona referenced her partner's parenting viewpoints relatively frequently. Perhaps this was due to Iona and her partner's relative isolation from others with children ("basically it's just … us").

5.2.7 Hearing Stories

Some mothers interviewed referenced hearing stories or being influenced by something somebody said but that the advice came from a passing interaction. For example:

> As much as people will probably frown at this, he's still sleeping in with us, at nine months … I know that usually they say at six months you should put them into their own room
>
> Rebecca (early 30s; SIMD 5; one baby son; U; hospitality trainer)

Rebecca seems to feel some disapproval from an undefined social source. Julie, a police officer, suggests that she may have heard the phrase "I blame the parents", and been encouraged to endorse the sentiment, by experiences at work: "Maybe from my job… I

must have picked it up from somewhere". Julie goes on to argue for the potential positive implications of hearing stories, in the prevention of domestic accidents (though acknowledged some professional guidance):

> Coin batteries, like I wouldn't have known how dangerous they were had I not seen it somewhere.
>
> Julie (mid 30s; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; U; police officer)

References to hearing stories could be seen as examples of explicitly voiced composite elements of a complex broader context of parenting culture.

5.2.8 Religion and Politics

References to religion were made by Caroline, Fadhila, Iona, Aroofa and Madhuri.

> I've always seen my mother pray, and … when my dad fell ill, then I started praying as well. And I just never stopped since I was 16. So my kids see me pray, but my husband doesn't pray … we're, you know, just trying to provide the best possible environment and exposure to the kids that you can.
>
> Fadhila (37; SIMD 5; one baby son, one mid age son, one mid age daughter, U, auditor, from USA and Pakistan)

There were also references on online forums to religious or spiritual concepts, including people who harm children going to hell, children being angels, and being guided by nature in terms of conception of children. Amid increasing secularization in the UK (Sherwood, 2019), religion and spirituality are clearly still important for some mothers.

Julie made several references to her politics or ethics guiding parenting decisions:

> You'd a kinda thing about, you know, it's a bit irresponsible when the world's overpopulated to have another baby.
>
> […]
>
> So, it was more kinda then thinking well how do you have a baby that fits in with your, you know, like going off plastic, or whatever it was. You know? So ... we've not bought anything for her, everything's been second hand or kinda gifted.
>
> […]
>
> We breastfeed because the whole Nestle thing, I just wouldn't ethically pick to use kinda milk when for years they were killing babies in Africa for profit.
>
> Julie (mid 30s; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; U; police officer)

Though other mothers (Elizabeth, Lauren) mentioned left wing or feminist politics, Julie was unusual in her specificity about parenting choices affected by these values.

5.2.9 Employment and Education

Some mothers were explicit about the influence of their jobs or education on their parenting behaviours. On online forums, a query about extra-curricular learning for four-year olds was addressed by people working as tutors who argued that formal teaching for children of that age was inappropriate. In interviews, Gillian, Julie, Catriona, Sinead, and Rebecca mentioned education or employment relevant to child development or parent-child relationships, which were influential to their thinking about parenting (the influence on Rebecca's was vicarious, via her mother who worked in education). Julie, a police officer, made a link between poor parenting and criminal activity, based on things she had seen in the course of her work. Her partner Catriona, who works in child mental health, talked about the influence of her job on deciding appropriate parenting behaviours:

> Certainly [I] can answer all the sort of academic type questions about things and … I've worked for [job name] so quite often advise people quite often on what to do if.
>
> Catriona (mid 30s; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; U; psychologist)

Sinead, who also works in child mental health, talked more about the influence of her doctorate in this area than her work:

> I just finished my doctorate shortly before I became pregnant with him ... that was all still really fresh, and I think in almost quite a conscious way … that's influenced me a lot, 'cause ... you just spent three years just thinking about what shapes a person and, you know, it's a new person to shape.
>
> Sinead (30s; SIMD 6; one baby son; U (doctorate); paediatric mental health practitioner; from Ireland)

5.2.10 Medical Authority

In discussion of parenting experts, Lee (2014b) outlines some historical examples of parenting advice, which she argues, highlight contemporary cultural prominence of the parenting expert. Lee (2014b, page 29) observes historical delegitimisation of tacit parenting knowledge and argues "perhaps the single most distinctive feature of expert commentaries and statements about today's parents is the tendency to reposition 'instinct' as either mythical or problematic". As I have shown in this chapter, many mothers state that 'instinct', social contexts and experiences are influential in their parenting. The next few subsections will examine discussion by mothers of the influence of parenting experts.

Contemporary childbearing is highly medicalised (Johansen et al, 2002, Clesse et al, 2018). It is not surprising then that many mothers (Alison, Aroofa, Fadhila, Jessica, Amber, Iona,

Madhuri, Rebecca, Sarah, Stacey), most interviewed within months of giving birth, mentioned parenting advice from doctors, midwives, family nurses or health visitors.

Some mothers (Alison, Jessica, Amber, Iona, Sarah) talked about feeling pressured to behave in certain ways by health professionals, particularly midwives and health visitors. Much of this pressure was around breastfeeding, as exemplified by Jessica's comment:

> My midwife pushed and pushed and pushed for breastfeeding and I said for at least a few weeks, I would try.
>
> Jessica (mid 20s; SIMD 1; two mid aged children, unemployed)

Rebecca, though refuting that she felt pressured to breastfeed, described a culture of health advice from professionals where breastfeeding was exclusively, and persuasively, promoted:

> All the midwives and health visitors are really pro breastfeeding ... Not that you feel pressured, but, everyone kind of says it's the thing to do, and it's ideal, really good for baby at the start. Like, full o' nutrients
>
> Rebecca (early 30s; SIMD 5; one baby son; U; hospitality trainer)

Mothers in interviews asked about breastfeeding motivations mentioned health or developmental benefits for their baby as a primary concern. Although there are scholars who critique the health benefits of breastfeeding (e.g. Joan Wolf, 2013), information from the NHS seems unequivocal in promotion of it (NHS, 2017). Many health professionals working in the NHS are also seen as unambiguous promoters of breastfeeding. Some mothers who had problems with breastfeeding discussed initial advice from health professionals to breastfeed, which several found pressurising, but this was relieved by a different clinician providing alternative, pragmatic advice.

> My midwife … was awful, and she was all about breastfeeding. She never once told me you were allowed to do both [breastfeed and formula feed] … She got ill one day and another midwife came ... I just was awful, in tears the whole time ... And this midwife said to me … "give the baby a bottle and see how you feel". I gave her a bottle and I did both for a few days and then I went straight to bottles. And you see when I went straight to bottles, I was totally fine again. I enjoyed being a mum again, in the first six weeks was "I hate this" … But actually that was what it was and I felt pressured to do it.
>
> Amber (20; SMID 4; one baby daughter; unemployed)

Amber talked of not knowing she was "allowed" to feed her baby with a combination of breast and formula milk. Alison had already decided she wanted to breastfeed, but due to her son's health she struggled to do this exclusively. She talked about differing advice

from clinicians, her own discomfort in a dilemma about feeding choices, and relief about definitive advice from a clinician with authority.

> I kind of just wanted someone to tell me what to do. … I think ...because you knew it was somebody you could trust and somebody with lots of experience as well. She was … somebody who was compassionate as well ... she was never ever sort of harsh or unpleasant and she never seemed like somebody that was in too much of a rush for you. So, I think you knew that if she was saying it, then it was coming from a good place. It wasn't just like make her give him formula to just hurry things along. You knew she'd actually thought about it.
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

Alison wanted somebody with authority to give definitive advice. Alison seemingly trusted this midwife, possibly because she was a qualified health professional, but also because of her individual characteristics indicating considered advice. In an online forum discussion, one mother wrote about evaluating the risks of child immunisations. She had been advised by a doctor to immunise her child, and decided to do so, though was fearful of possible harms. She justified her decision by reasoning that she would feel less guilty should some harm occur, because she was following the advice from a doctor.

Many mothers had seemingly been influenced in their parenting decisions by health professionals. However, when asked in interviews where they would go for advice on parenting, only Aroofa and Fadhila responded with a health professional in the first instance.

Fadhila was quite assured of the usefulness of advice from health professionals, though caveated her prioritising of it in uncertainty of other sources of authoritative advice. The mothers interviewed felt medical advice was seemingly ubiquitous. At times this felt pressurising, and perhaps even bullying. However, it did also seem to be trusted. This was largely echoed in discussion on online forums, most notably in discussion of vaccinations, with a minority arguing that vaccinations may be dangerous, and a majority arguing that they were beneficial for health. Many of those arguing for the benefits of vaccinations did so referencing medical advice or research evidence. One poster argued that the NHS would not provide vaccinations, and recommend their use, if they were not necessary.

Of the mothers interviewed who mentioned seeking parenting advice online, some (Lauren, Sarah and Iona) sought out information on the NHS website specifically.

Gillian argued that advice for health issues should be sought from medical professionals and hinted that reliance on online, lay sources, may be dangerous:

> I've seen people that have posted things like, you know, "My baby's got a temperature and he's done this…" And, I'm like, "Don't put that online!" "Get your baby just to the doctor." Like, so I think a lot of people live in this bubble of kind of online support.
>
> Gillian (42; SIMD 6; one baby son; U; works for NHS in social role)

Madhuri and Rebecca mentioned having relatives who were medical professionals, who they took advice from. Rebecca seemed to indicate that at least some of her family member's authority came from her professional status:

> My mother-in-law, she works for the NHS, quite high up in the NHS actually, and she was, actually she was great. … She gave me like quite a lot of information on the benefits of [breastfeeding]
>
> Rebecca (early 30s; SIMD 5; one baby son; U; hospitality trainer)

Similarly, Gillian's reference to a member of the group chat she sought advice from being a doctor could be taken as an indication of the authority or trustworthiness of advice from the group:

> [I would seek parenting advice] probably online or like the group of people that I met at the [baby] group, because we've got like a WhatsApp chat, you know, there's twelve of us, and from quite varied, like you know, there's a girl that's a paediatric doctor on it. There's people that have already, a couple of people have already had children.
>
> Gillian (42; SIMD 6; one baby son; U; works for NHS in social role)

Interestingly, as well as a nod to medical authority, Gillian seems to argue that the authority may come from the number and diversity of individuals and that some of the group may have experiential expertise as mothers.

5.2.11 Scientific Research

Sinead and Catriona, both child psychologists, referenced the direct influence of their academic training on their parenting behaviours. In addition to this, they argued that their academic training meant they had a familiarity with research about parenting, and that they used research evidence as a rationale for parenting decisions.

Shona is a scientist, working in the field of chemistry. She also referenced the importance of research evidence to her considering something trustworthy advice:

> I think … it's probably 'cause we're scientists, we ... believe like there should be like research before just saying something. But I don't always like want to read the actual research … I think sometimes knowing … it's not just like a folk tale or a like a made-up old wives' tale type thing… it makes me more likely to think, "oh,

> that might work or that'd be worth trying," or something, rather than well someone just said this, and it's magic.
>
> Shona (34; SIMD 9; one baby son; U; scientist)

It seemed sufficient for Shona that there was an indication something was evidence based, without needing to read the original research.

In discussion of immunisations on online forums, there was frequent reference to research evidence, largely by people arguing for the benefit of vaccinations. Some posters identified themselves as having some scientific training which they argued gave them familiarity with the literature and expertise in seeking it out. Several encouraged others to read scientific evidence themselves and one argued that the evidence is all available online and parents should seek this out, assess it, and disregard advice from medical professionals and others if it contradicted the conclusions they had come to from their reading.

In interviews, some mothers referred to perceptions of vaccinations and breastfeeding, which may have been routed in evidence, but the exact mechanism for these mothers being aware of it is unclear.

> You know, with the information that's out there then, breast is best.
>
> Sarah (30s; SIMD 6; one baby daughter; accountancy related field)

This comment from Sarah went on to reference midwives and antenatal classes, so there was a hint, not overtly expressed, that exposure to evidence about breastfeeding and vaccinations may be second hand, via health professionals. Stacey critiqued individualistic advice based on personal experience, preferring evidence-based advice, though again the source of her awareness of this evidence was unclear:

> I'd rather have, like, evidence. I'd rather know, like, what I'm doing is right for the child and it's been proven to be right, you know, rather than just someone's put, "oh I did it this way"
>
> Stacey (38; SIMD 3; one mid aged son who has autism; unemployed- left job in payroll due to stress of caring for son)

Stacey went on to talk about how she seeks out advice from experts online, so perhaps this exposure to evidence is again second hand, this time via experts she has identified on the internet.

5.2.12 Psychological Expertise

Lee (2014b, pages 59-61) outlined a shift in the mid twentieth century where interest among parenting experts moved from teaching good behaviour to a focus on child

development and psychology. This was most notable in reference to John Bowlby's theories on attachment. Lee cites Lupton and Barclay (1997, page 42, cited Lee, 2014b, page 66) to argue that at the end of the twentieth century there was a further shift from interest in the psychological development of the child, to interest in parents' impact on this development.

In interviews, Sinead, Rebecca and Catriona mentioned that they aspired to parent in an attachment focussed way. On online parenting forums, there was a thread asking for recommendations for literature on adoption. Explanations for the recommendations of the books were either because they detailed the process of adoption, because they gave advice and information about attachment, or because they were written by an adoptive parent. Some of these recommendations were explained as being a combination of these factors.

Other mothers interviewed, while not mentioning attachment, did mention wanting to parent in ways that paid attention to the psychological development of their child. For example, Aroofa watched videos shared by friends on social media which arguably promoted parenting behaviours related to child psychology:

> I'm … watching [films made by unnamed parenting experts, shared by friends] whenever I am, you know, checking my Facebook account. And it's sometimes that there is something to learn from them as well, like how to control your child or how to … let your child get bored … That idea went to me because what I tried before was [when] he's getting bored, I'll try to engage with him, engage him in some stories or some rhymes or things like that. But then I came across a video that … said to me, that it's okay to ... let the child get bored ... because he would be more creative
>
> Aroofa (26; SIMD 1; one baby son; U; PhD student; from Pakistan)

Madhuri argued that study of child psychology was important for consideration of good motherhood, but was not specific about what this might entail in terms of parenting behaviours:

> We just need to study the baby psychology, what they are up to, so I think that would make a good mother
>
> Madhuri (early 30s; SIMD 5; one baby daughter; U; unemployed though professional background in HR; originally from India)

Lee's arguments for the permeation of ideas from the field of child psychology into common conceptualisations of appropriate parenting behaviour can be seen to be evidenced, at least in part, by these comments in interviews and on online parenting forums. Though Sinead, Rebecca and Catriona spoke specifically about attachment,

Aroofa, Annalie and Madhuri spoke in more general terms indicating their endorsement of the importance of consideration of child psychological development.

5.2.13 Parent Training

Most mothers interviewed discussed attending some sort of parent training or community group, either pre or post-natally. The training classes attended were numerous and many unnamed, so it is not possible to ascertain if there were common, dominant themes taught to participants. However, that attendance of these groups was so common is perhaps indicative of support for ideas about parenting being a set of skills, which can be taught. Having said this, mothers gave their rationale for attending such groups as multiple, and included social opportunities for themselves.

Lee cites Hardyment's (2007, page 286, cited 2014b, page 38) argument that the contemporary climate of parenting advice is characterised by the numerousness and diversity of advice sources and that there is no single, dominant expert. In interviews, there were very few parenting experts referenced by name. Siobhan and Catriona both mentioned Gina Ford but dismissed her methods. Annalie referenced Gabor Maté. Rebecca and Stacey both talked about using advice from Annabel Karmel's books on infant feeding. The scarcity of specific parenting experts referenced in interviews aligns with Hardyment's argument that there is no contemporary dominant parenting expert. Her argument for the multiplicity of experts can perhaps also be backed by some comments made in interviews. For example, Alison references having multiple parenting advice books, none of which she finds useful:

> I tell you we've got a stack of baby books there, which I could honestly drop kick across the room. They are the biggest load of crap in the world
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

Gillian also mentioned the ubiquity of parenting advice literature:

> Before I had him, you know, I bought a couple of books … and I did get a couple of books out the library. So, like online there's information online everywhere
>
> Gillian (42; SIMD 6; one baby son; U; works for NHS in social role)

5.2.14 Parents as Experts

Another phenomenon of expertise in contemporary parenting culture identified by Hardyment and paraphrased by Lee is that of the parent as expert.

> [A]n interesting development is the emergence of the parent-parenting expert; that is, parents (often celebrities) who present their 'journey' to becoming a parenting

> experts as one that began with their own experience, and led them to 'share' what they had come to understand to help others.
>
> Lee, 2014b, page 38

In interviews and online forums, there were several comments which suggested the experience of being a parent could grant expertise and authority. Caroline implied the number of children and grandchildren her grandmother had increased her expertise, and meant her advice should be trusted:

> My Nana … she had nine children … [and] numerous grandchildren, so my Nana was a lady who knew children. And, when she discovered that I was expecting [first child, she gave some advice] … And, I tried to stick to that [advice]
>
> Caroline (49; SIMD 1; two mid age daughters, one with autism, one adult daughter, currently unemployed though starting university soon)

In discussion of apportioning blame to parents for children's behaviour, Alison referenced opinions cited by (presumably) other parents online, but that she felt that due to a lack of parenting experience, she didn't have enough expertise to form a conclusive opinion.

> A lot of what I read … [on] parenting forums, people … want you to blame the parents … [but] I don't think I know enough about raising kids right now to make a call on that.
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

Alison also talked of taking advice and reassurance from other mothers. The advice was that her knowledge of her son would be greater than the knowledge of a medical professional, arguably due to the amount and quality of time they spent together. She seemed to gain some reassurance from the people responding to her not only because of shared experience of this condition but also because they were mothers.

Iona found advice from other mothers, in relation to breastfeeding, to be more detailed than that provided by health professionals:

> I think with a lot of health visitors or health professionals ... we're told, oh "breast is best", and they come out and they promote that. But they don't actually know anything in between. 'Cause breastfeeding I think is a journey. …I went to… [breastfeeding group] ... I think … 'cause… they're all breastfeeding, they can give more information than maybe a health professional that isn't breastfeeding or something could… they've got, like, living, like, experience on that. So I felt they were more helpful that my health visitor.
>
> Iona (21; SIMD 2; one baby daughter, one baby son; U)

There was also some scepticism expressed about the authoritativeness of parents as parenting experts. Stacey argued that parents should not criticise other parents because they should know, through experience, how hard parenting is. She went on to give an example of poor advice given by an individual who cited their parenting experience as authority.

> [In a Facebook post] there was a woman saying …she didn't think her baby was getting enough food and the baby wasn't sleeping through the night, what do I do? And this [other] woman said, well she was going to be 60. She's got so many grown up kids, like, five or something. "Stick a bit of porridge in their bottle", you know, and do all this. And it's like, your baby would choke. You're not supposed to that, you know …but she's like, "well I've had five kids, it's never harmed them. I know best", kind of thing.
>
> Stacey (38; SIMD 3; one mid aged son who has autism; unemployed- left job in payroll due to stress of caring for son)

Gillian's first port of call for advice was to contact other mothers she knew, or to read advice posted online by other mothers. In discussion of the group chat she uses, she stated that several of the mothers involved already had children, arguably implying this gave them authority via lived experience. Although she talked of reading posts written online, presumably by parents, she did not perceive them as authoritative. The lack of perceived authority of online sources is perhaps because, in part, they are written by individual mothers, with unknown but presumed different circumstances.

> There's quite a lot of sites, there's like … Mumsnet… [and] Netmums … I do take them with a pinch of salt … I'll maybe kind of trust sites like that for, for certain things really. … [Because] I think … everybody's kind of got their own opinion with things as well, ... and ... everybody's baby's different as well.
>
> Gillian (42; SIMD 6; one baby son; U; works for NHS in social role)

Iona was also dismissive of advice on online parenting forums:

> If I had to go somewhere, it would probably be NHS, 'cause you'll look on a lot of mums forums, and they all say things, and I'm like, maybe that's not true, 'cause this is just people that are saying that.
>
> Iona (21; SIMD 2; one baby daughter; university student)

I find Iona's rationale for finding parenting forum content untrustworthy quite difficult to fully interpret. It may be that she used the words "just people" in order to imply their lay status and separate them from a category of experts who could be trusted. It could also be that she is referring to a perception that discourse around parenting, particularly that which

is expressed online, is constituted of meaningless conversations, almost for the sake of conversation.

5.2.15 Seeking Advice from Forums or Other Online Sources

It is noticeable that the previous two quotes from interviews referred to parenting forums. Gillian mentioned advice from mothers she knew from face-to-face contact as well as ones she does not know, via the internet. The advice she got from known mothers is also mediated, in this case via an online messaging app. Although not usually overtly expressed, it is likely that many of the sources of advice and influence for mothers already discussed in the chapter, were mediated in some way.

I did not make a deliberate point to tell mothers in interviews that I was also analysing online forum content (though this did sometimes come up). However, *Netmums* and other online parenting forums were mentioned by several of the interviewees. Gillian and Catriona mentioned reading *Netmums*. Alison, Gillian, Lauren, Rebecca and Sarah all mentioned *Mumsnet*, by name. Elizabeth, Shona, Iona, Alison, Rebecca and Angela referred to online parenting forums but did not name them. As Gillian and Iona's previous comments demonstrate, some mothers interviewed were dismissive of parenting forum content. For other mothers though, they were used as a source of information. They seemed to be particularly influential for Alison:

> I think probably without really consciously knowing it, Mumsnet's maybe been quite a big thing because I read it loads, well I've read it loads for years I think just because ... a lot of the non-parenting kind of chat on there can be quite interesting, and but you kind of absorb some of the parenting stuff as you go along and you look at the problems people are posting and you think, 'Oh, maybe that's something that I should store away for future reference.'
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

Elizabeth argued that online forums can be used to fill gaps in advice from what might be considered traditional or qualified medical sources:

> I have so much respect for the NHS ... I think that the staff are just amazing. But yeah, there are definitely gaps, so the good thing is we've got social media and like this generation, you know, if you want to ask any kind of question … and I can see from reading through forums that a lot of questions have been answered like almost on a daily basis, so there's that resource
>
> Elizabeth (29; SIMD 6; two baby daughters; U; folk musician)

That online forums were available and varied source of information was mentioned by others, though with more scepticism of the trustworthiness of the content, and in Catriona's case, some exasperation at the ubiquity of such sources:

> I've sometimes got a few things from Mumsnet, although I don't want to believe everything I hear on Mumsnet. A wee bit scaremongering sometimes, but, sometimes it is good for ideas.
>
> Rebecca (early 30s; SIMD 5; one baby son; U; hospitality trainer)

> You can't Google anything to do with babies or parenting without having an answer from Netmums really high up in the Google search. So you find yourself on that a lot.
>
> Catriona (mid 30s; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; U; psychologist)

In a statement announcing a data agreement between *Netmums* and DMG Media they boasted: "Used by three in four UK mums, Netmums is the nation's biggest parenting site, with over 2 million registered members and 9 million monthly unique users" (DMG Media, 2017). If these figures are to be believed, then it is not unreasonable to argue that *Netmums* is an important source of parenting advice and influence for many mothers. Analysis of the online forums themselves showed numerous instances of posters asking other forum members for advice on parenting. Even those threads which did not pose a question to be answered, were all initiated with a comment presumably to encourage responses and instigate conversation.

Facebook groups operate in quite a similar way to traditional internet forums, where members read and post about a topic around which the group is organised. Alison, Jessica, Gillian, Annalie, Sinead, Stacey, Elizabeth and Iona all mentioned engaging with parenting related Facebook groups, though when named, they were not the same groups. Of these mothers, Jessica, Gillian and Annalie said they used these groups to get advice or information. Alison talked about using a Facebook group partly for information, but also for support. Other mothers who said they used Facebook groups about parenting were wary of the conversation and culture in such groups, as exemplified by Sinead's comment:

> There's a ton of like parenting Facebook groups and some of them are so toxic. But, I'm in like one that's quite good, and very small, but… I don't know on balance how helpful they are
>
> Sinead (30s; SIMD 6; one baby son; U (doctorate); paediatric mental health practitioner; from Ireland)

5.2.16 Citing Media as a Source

All mothers, when asked in interviews, talked of engaging with media, both broadcast and interactive. Alison, Gillian, Angela, Stacey, Jessica and to a lesser extent, Rebecca cited the media, particularly the internet, as a key source of parenting advice. Fadhila, Julie and Catriona, Annalie, Madhuri, Sarah and Sinead spoke about seeking information about parenting online but did not identify the internet as a key source of advice. This online information searching tended to be fairly ad hoc, to address issues as they arose. For example, Fadhila's description of her use of Google:

> He's got a wart on his face, let me Google that, you know? … Of course, you Google everything.

Fadhila (37; SIMD 5; one baby son, one mid age son, one mid age daughter, U, auditor, from USA and Pakistan)

5.2.17 Celebrity Parents

In Christina Hardyment's history of childcare advice, she reflected on recent trends in parenting experts:

> A spate of much-photographed celebrities either having babies or adopting them was what led to the cleverly marketed concept of 'yummy mummies': style conscious and competitive women who can afford [various staff] … Arguably the first of them was Paula Yates … in 1990…[.] Today's celebrity yummy mummies don't need to put finger to keyboard: the media do it for them.

Hardyment, 2007, pages 301, 302 and 303

In interviews, Angela brought up Holly Willoughby and Katie Price; Paige and Rebecca- Kim Kardashian; Sarah- Reese Witherspoon and Chrissy Teigen; Iona- Meghan Markle and Kate Middleton; and Stacey, Annalie and Gillian talked about celebrity parents more generally. When these mothers talked about these examples of celebrity parents, it was usually in terms Hardyment used to describe "yummy mummies": they are rich, fashionable women, with various staff and were all famous before becoming mothers. Stacey and Angela mentioned celebrity mothers in terms that indicated they had some influence on their parenting behaviours or the way they felt about their parenting behaviours.

> Seeing the way other families are … celebrity families and that, you see all the good stuff usually on the TV … it looks like the perfect family. In movies, like when you watch movies, and you see the way families are in the movies and you just think that's what real life should be like. That's the way you want it to be.

Stacey (38; SIMD 3; one mid aged son who has autism; unemployed- left job in payroll due to stress of caring for son)

> Being surrounded by people who are saying their lives are perfect and they're not struggling wi' this, that and the next thing, has a major impact. You get parents on TV, like Holly Willoughby, who looks amazing, and she comes across as this amazing mum, she's keeping a full-time job, she's doing all this.

Angela (39; SIMD 2; two mid aged sons, both with behavioural conditions; U; works for parenting organisation)

Other mothers (Rebecca, Iona, Annalie and Sarah), implied that these celebrities, due to their wealth and consequent ability to pay for assistance, could not be considered realistic examples of motherhood which could be emulated.

> With celebrities now … they just look glamorous all the time ... But I think people… probably can see straight. Or most people. It's not possible unless you have some help.

Annalie (late 30s/ early 40s; SIMD 5; one baby daughter; classical musician; from South Africa)

Although these interviewed mothers dismissed the influence (on them) of celebrity mothers, seemingly based on being unrelatable, that they brought them up indicates that they feature in their social world in some way. These celebrities are part of these interviewees' repertoire of examples of motherhood and parenting.

As an alternative to "yummy mummies", Hardyment describes a later iteration of celebrity mothers as experts: "slummy mummies".

> Freelance journalists who have babies [and] turn a profitable penny writing columns boasting of being 'slummy mummies', or even 'scummy mummies'… They challenge the views of the experts, reassure ordinary imperfect parents and tell good jokes

Hardyment, 2007, page 305

These 'slummy mummies', would presumably be seen as more relatable than celebrity 'yummy mummies'. Columns written by journalist mothers were not mentioned by mothers in interviews or online. Hardyment was writing in 2007, before mass use of social media. Mothers today live in a different media environment. Hardyment's argument that the 'yummy mummies' don't need to write books because the media publicises their lives without their intervention negates the contemporary prominence of celebrities on social media. Though they may well employ people to manage their social media accounts, so not strictly putting "finger to keyboard" themselves, it is them and their 'team' deciding on what gets circulated in the media, not newspaper editors.

Gillian and Rebecca mentioned following, via social media, some parents who could fit in to a category of "ordinary imperfect", and therefore relatable.

> I follow quite a few mums on social media, on Instagram particularly, and a lot of the ones I probably can relate to most are the ones that talk quite honestly about parenthood. And, yeah, give a bit more of a realistic look on it. … I follow ... quite big Instagram names ... They actually are showing you like real-life stuff that actually happens. And you think "yep, I can relate to that".
>
> Rebecca (30s; SIMD 5; one baby son; U; hospitality trainer)

The celebrity 'yummy mummies' were typically famous before becoming mothers. Although the 'slummy mummies' Hardyment described had a platform via mainstream newspapers, and some may well have had some sort of celebrity status, it was through writing about being a parent that they found their lucrative niche. Similarly, the parenting 'influencers' mentioned by Rebecca and Gillian were not widely known before they had children and posted about it on social media. In Lee's description of the contemporary phenomenon of the "parent-parenting expert", parents "present their 'journey' to becoming parenting experts as one that began with their own experience, and led them to 'share' what they had come to understand to help others" (Lee, 2014b, page 38). These 'parent-parenting experts' get their authority as experts not just through their status as a mother and perceived experience, but in their ability to successfully 'share' their expertise through deft use of social media.

5.3 Key Media Channels Cited by Mothers

5.3.1 Which Media and Why?

Mothers in interviews, and online, cited many different influences on their parenting beliefs and practices, including the media. The remainder of this chapter will focus on the influence of the media specifically. This is contextualised and foregrounded by Research Question 2a: *What are the main media channels mothers are exposed to?*

All interviewed mothers mentioned using a social networking platform, with most using Facebook (Alison, Aroofa, Caroline, Elizabeth, Fadhila, Gillian, Iona, Julie, Catriona, Lauren, Annalie, Madhuri, Paige, Sarah, Shona, Sinead, Stacey, Jessica, Amber, Jade) though some (Angela and Rebecca), deliberately chose not to. Other networks used included Instagram (Alison, Gillian, Madhuri, Rebecca, Sarah, Shona, Sinead), Twitter (Caroline, Lauren, Madhuri, Rebecca), YouTube (Annalie and Madhuri) and Snapchat (Angela).

On online forum threads analysed, there was a similar mix of social media platforms used:

	Number of forum members who either stated using this media type or implied using it, usually by posting a link	Number of forum members who said they avoided or had deleted this media type
Facebook	27	13
Twitter	6	5
Instagram	3	5
YouTube	12	
Snapchat		1

Table 5.1 Social media platforms used by online forum posters

Facebook is clearly the most used social network platform by mothers interviewed and mothers posting on the online forums studied. This is not unexpected given Facebook's global popularity (LSE, undated) and particular popularity with young adult women (LSE, undated). Forty-two million people in the UK use Facebook, compared to 16 million UK Twitter users and 14 million UK Instagram users (LSE, undated).

US data suggests Facebook's popularity is similar across different income groups, however, greater percentages of people on higher incomes use Instagram and Twitter than those on lower incomes (Khoros, 2020). Data on the incomes of the online forum users is unknown. However, in interviews, there was some indication that Twitter and Instagram were used mainly by mothers who had higher household incomes (using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation score for their area of residence). An exception to this was Twitter user Caroline who lives in an extremely deprived area and at the time of the interview had been unemployed for some time. Her partner, Gary, had recently been made redundant from his job. It is possible her use of Twitter is linked to her interest in politics.

> Both of us are quite political, and from the time of the [Scottish Independence] referendum we've both really avoided mainstream media. So, we, we tend to stick to social media and get a lot of our information from on there.
>
> Caroline (49; SIMD 1; two mid age daughters, one with autism, one adult daughter, currently unemployed though due to start university soon)

Mellon and Prosser's (2017) research found Twitter users to be more politically engaged than non-users (though Facebook users were not).

In terms of broadcast media, there was little overlap of television programmes, newspapers, books or magazines cited as used by mothers in initial interviews. However,

several mentioned keeping up with news and current affairs and of those that did, the most common source was the BBC. Seven mothers made reference to listening to BBC radio (Sinead, Rebecca, Lauren, Shona, Gillian, Elizabeth, Fadhila) four mentioned the *BBC News* app or website (Julie, Annalie, Stacey, Shona), one mentioned watching BBC news on television (Stacey) and three mentioned watching news on television but didn't specify the channel (Elizabeth, Annalie, Alison). There was limited repetition of use of other news sources; two people mentioned reading the *Guardian* and the *New York Times* (Lauren and Sinead) and there was one mention each of reading *Buzzfeed* (Alison), *Irish Times* (Sinead), *Yahoo* (Madhuri), *News 24* (Annalie), *STV News* (Stacey), *The Sun* (Angela) and the *Daily Mail* (Angela). All these news sources were accessed online.

Some mothers reported listening to non-BBC radio stations; Stacey listened to *Heart* and *Clyde 1*, Annalie to *Classic FM* and Gillian to *Absolute*.

Alison, Julie, Catriona, Lauren and Sinead all watched *Netflix*. Julie and Catriona mentioned watching television on BBC iPlayer and Sinead via Amazon Prime. In terms of broadcast channels engaged with, there was also a prevalence of the BBC for mothers posting on online forums:

		Number of forum members who either stated using this media type or implied using it, usually by posting a link	Number of forum members who said they avoided this media type
BBC	Online	7	
	TV	33 (29 of which came from a discussion of one particular programme)	1
	Radio	3	
Sky		4	1
Channel 4			
Channel 5			
ITV		1	
STV			
S4C			
UTV			
Netflix		1	
Amazon Prime			
iPlayer			

Table 5.2 Television channels watched by online forum users

Mothers interviewed specified watching some television series; *Eastenders* (Stacey), *River City* (Stacey, Angela), *This Morning* (Stacey, Alison, Paige), *Loose Women* (Stacey, Alison), *90 Day Fiance* (Stacey), *One Born Every Minute* (Elizabeth, Julie and Catriona), *Love Island* (Sarah), *Desperate Housewives* (Julie), *Malcolm in the Middle* (Julie) and *The Last Leg* (Angela). Some online forum posters mentioned watching similar television programmes:

	Number of forum members who stated they watched this programme	Number of forum members who said they avoided this programme
Eastenders	2	1
Coronation Street	1	
Hollyoaks	1	
River City		
One Born Every Minute	1	
This Morning	1	
Loose Women		
The Last Leg		
Love Island		
90 Day Fiancé		

Table 5.3 Television programmes watched by online forum users

It was in relation to newspapers read where mothers posting on online forums seemed to diverge most from the mothers interviewed.

	Number of forum members who either stated they read this newspaper or implied reading it, usually by posting a link	Number of forum members who said they avoided this newspaper
Daily Mail	21	15
Sun	1	2
Guardian	2	1
Telegraph	5	
The Times	3	1
Mirror		2
Daily Record	2	
Express	3	1
Metro		

Table 5.4 Newspapers read by online forum users

The most noticeable difference is the attention, on online forums, given to the *Daily Mail*. The one interviewee who reported reading the *Daily Mail*, Angela, said she only did so because she didn't like the content of the newspaper. On online forums however, it was the third most popular media channel (behind BBC television and Facebook). Part of the reason why newspapers seemed to be a more popular type of media on online forums than for those mothers interviewed may be because links to articles were posted on to the forums to form part of the discussion, and in some cases, to instigate it. Clearly this way of directly referencing media in discussion lends itself to the use of online newspapers in online forums very effectively. Referencing online articles is not possible in the same way in offline conversation and direct reference to other media on online forums does not have the same immediacy. It is possible that links to some newspapers, like the *Time*s and the *Telegraph* were avoided because they require payment to view. However, all of this does not account for why the *Daily Mail* was discussed so much more on online forums than every other newspaper or broadcast media.

The *Daily Mail* is the most popular newspaper read online in the UK (Ponsford, 2019). It might therefore be expected that the *Daily Mail* would be the most frequently referenced both online and in interviews. This was clearly not the case in interviews and though it was on online forums, if general popularity of the newspaper could be taken as an indicator of popularity in this sample, then one would expect newspapers like the *Sun*, which has similar readership figures as the *Daily Mail* (Ponsford, 2019), to be similarly referenced.

There are demographic differences in the readership of various newspapers which may be important. The *Daily Mail* is considered to have a right-wing stance (Smith, 2017) and is read in similar proportions by those in NRS social grades ABC1 and C2DE, whereas other tabloids are more popular among people in C2DE grades (Ofcom, 2018). Several posters on online forums described themselves as having right-wing views. None of the mothers interviewed described themselves as right-wing and one, Elizabeth, explicitly described herself as left-wing. Though assumptions about social class could be made about the mothers interviewed based on their jobs or the areas they lived in, the only mother who talked about grouping herself as middle class was Sinead (who reads the *Guardian*, the *Irish Times* and the *New York Times*). One poster on the online forum argued that the readership of the *Daily Mail* is largely middle class and implied that she considered herself to be middle class when she said that she read it.

It may be that demographic differences in the sample of interviewees and online posters account for some of the discrepancies between media channel popularity. However, I suggest that such large discrepancies may be more to do with how the *Daily Mail* in particular represents issues. Looking at the figures of those who avoid the *Mail* compared to those who choose to read it, there is an implication that the *Daily Mail* is considered polarising and therefore provocative. I would argue that as the purpose of online forums is in part to facilitate discussion, linking to provocative content is an efficient way to encourage discussion and may therefore provide some explanation for the frequency of reference to it on online forums, compared to other newspapers.

5.3.2 Differing Engagement with Media

It is quite difficult to identify terminology that best describes the relationship between people and media. People may be described as *consuming* media, sometimes people as *using* it and sometimes there is talk of people *engaging* with media. This is partly because of different relationships different people have with different media types but also because media types, and the way they work, have changed. When television first began to be popularised, people watching television were called "lookers in", before the term "viewers" was adopted (Moran, 2013, page 18). The two terms, to me, indicate different conceptualisations of the relationship between audiences and producers. Similarly, as the internet and social media have become ever more popular, it is clearly inaccurate to describe people using it as readers, or viewers. Tim Berners Lee, when developing the World Wide Web, set out with the idea that people would contribute to as well as look at existing content, in what he called the "read/write web" (BBC, 2005). Perhaps people are better described then as engaging with internet-based media, as the term suggests some sort of an exchange of information. There are different levels of engagement though; not everybody who uses social media posts anything and not everybody who watches television does so in a completely passive way. Fletcher distinguishes between classified and display advertisements based on a dichotomy of engagement:

> [T]here are advertisements which people look for (classifieds), and advertisements which look for people (display). Display advertisements are necessarily intrusive, because they must catch the attention of people not initially interested in their messages; classified advertisements are not intrusive because they rely on people perusing them for items they are consciously searching for.
>
> Fletcher, 2010, page 23

I suggest that people's relationship with media could be considered in similar terms. There are instances where people might be exposed to a message in a passive way, by scrolling

through social media, putting the radio on in the car, or switching on the television in the evening. There are also more active ways people might be exposed to a message, by reading books about a specific topic, or Googling to find specific information.

There were numerous examples where mothers, both online and in interviews, described active and passive relationships with media. Many threads on online forums were instigated by a mother making an initial post seeking advice and information. I would consider this quite an active relationship with media: the mother has decided they want a particular piece of information and has taken steps to pursue it. In some instances, there was a sort of meta-active media interaction, when a post on the online forum requested recommendations of other media (for example books for prospective adopters or podcasts about hypnobirthing).

Alison described an active engagement with media when she recounted posting online to find alternative advice to that she'd received from a health visitor:

> I'd just got back from the health visitor, and I was trying to get a reflux diagnosis for him and I was just feeling rotten because I felt like … they thought I was talking out my backside. … But then, and I came home and I posted something along those lines like, "Like, has anybody else had an experience like this?"
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

Some mothers in interviews (Iona, Lauren, Fadhila, Shona) talked of making internet searches to trouble shoot problems or find information about specific issues.

> If I just wonder something, then I'd usually try and look for it online.
>
> Iona (21; SIMD 2; one baby daughter; university student)

Rebecca described being guided by media messages about weaning her son, and actively seeking these out by reading books and searching the internet for information:

> Influences… weaning … I did read quite a lot of books, well I read the Annabel Karmel book, and I looked up some things online, just recipes and things online for him for different sort of purées and things we could maybe start. So yeah, books definitely. Some things online as well.
>
> Rebecca (30s; SIMD 5; one baby son; U; hospitality trainer)

Sinead referenced choosing certain media because of assumed content (wanting to avoid didactic sources in favour of academic, research-based information), while also taking quite an active approach to information seeking:

> I'm more academic, slightly less, "This is how I did it, and I must…" … I guess it was geared towards maybe the slightly more academic stuff. Like, 'cause I was thinking about his sleep, and there's kind of this good Infant Sleep Centre at the University of Durham, and they have kind of a lot information for the parents and health professionals
>
> Sinead (30s; SIMD 6; one baby son; U (doctorate); paediatric mental health practitioner; from Ireland)

Mothers online and in interviews also mentioned relationships to media messages that were more passive. For example, Gillian and Shona have the radio or music on while they are at home with their children.

Some mothers, like Alison and Annalie, seemed to have a routine where they would switch on the television at a particular time of day. For Annalie this was in the evening and for Alison the morning:

> When I get up with him in the morning after he's had his breakfast, we'll come in here, put the telly on, maybe watch a bit of the breakfast news … and I'll be checking my phone throughout the day... that's where I get most of my news from these days, like I follow The Guardian and the New York Times, and stuff like that on Facebook and that's where I'll find out most of what's going on in the outside world, basically.
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

In this comment, Alison also mentions how she browses social media, picking up news from traditional news sources, via social media. Though the day-to-day activity of browsing social media is quite passive, there have been active choices made at some stage about who she follows and what she clicks on. A key consideration in relation to social media is that it is not just the person interacting with it that is making choices; there are changes made to what is displayed based on previous activity, "chosen" by computer algorithms. This is something that was noticed by some mothers, like Gillian:

> Things pop up that ... I must have typed into Google or something, and then all of a sudden, there's adverts for it on Facebook and things
>
> Gillian (42; SIMD 6; one baby son; U; works for NHS in social role)

If display advertising, as Fletcher describes it, is taken as a passive exposure to a media message, then it is important to note that there were several instances where mothers mentioned, unprompted, examples of such advertising. Julie and Catriona discussed two television adverts; one for Aptimil infant formula feed, and one for washing detergent pods. On online forums, there were some threads specifically started to discuss (mainly

television) adverts. These were for Nationwide Building Society, the furniture retailer IKEA, Dettol cleaning products, Pampers nappies, the retailer Littlewoods, and the children's charity the NCPCC. Although people can make choices about which television channel to watch and when, and there are of course trends monitored by the advertising industry to try to match certain products with target audiences, the choices available to viewers about what they are exposed to are limited. People switching on the same television channel, at the same time, will watch the same thing. Millions of people are exposed to the same media messages, at the same time, when they switch on the television in the evening to watch the most popular programmes. Moran comments that the early term for television viewers 'lookers in' "suggested they were eaves dropping on something not meant solely for their eyes and ears" (Moran, 2013, page 18). That is not to say that the intended audience was not them, but that the intended audience was not *just* them. Broadcast media is indiscriminate in a way that newer, internet-based media are not.

> The word 'broadcasting', which radio borrowed about a hundred years ago from the farmers' term for scattering seeds over a wide surface rather than neatly in rows, carried the same connotations of chance.
>
> Moran, 2013, page 18

In a contemporary media landscape, I would argue that there exists a mid-ground to the active/ passive dichotomy of media interaction. Social media content is user generated and decisions are made about which users to follow, and therefore what content is seen. Although at first, scrolling through social media and not interacting with posts, might be considered quite a passive relationship with media, there have been active choices made. This is a sentiment expressed by Rebecca:

> We've actually got like a wee mum and baby Instagram page, but we follow, like a few other mums. … That's where Instagram has its good points and its bad points, because you, I suppose you can choose who you follow
>
> Rebecca (early 30s; SIMD 5; one baby son; U; hospitality trainer)

As previously discussed, there were several mothers who in interviews mentioned using Facebook groups about parenting. For most, like Amber, they did this passively, by reading and not adding to content:

> [Facebook groups] can ... be really helpful, I think. I don't post on them but I read other people's, because someone's always posted what you want to know.
>
> Amber (20; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; unemployed)

There is still an active element to this relationship with media though, Amber has deliberately joined this Facebook group, and therefore some sort of decision about what media messages to be exposed to has been made. For some, these choices are based on perceptions of content, though there was often also consideration of interaction with others. Stacey decided to follow a parenting related Facebook group, which presumably has various discussions and representations of parenting. Further than that, she had active interactions, posting responses to others' queries, while moderating her responses dependent on potential reactions from others.

> I also follow a Facebook page. ... So there's, like, mums going on and asking questions ... And you see some of the opinions on there. You know, it's, like, very, kind of, one sided, like, strong opinions … I answer some of the questions. I don't tend to really ask questions on it… You just find that you have to, kind of like, just bite your tongue and think, do I say anything here?
>
> Stacey (38; SIMD 3; one mid aged son who has autism; unemployed- left job in payroll due to stress of caring for son)

There has already been mention of the effect of social media algorithms. Exposure to adverts and other content related to previous activities, chosen by computer learning, might initially be seen as something a person cannot make deliberate choices about. One mother interviewed though, was not only aware of changes to the content she saw on Facebook, but was also aware of platform settings which can be adjusted.

> I saw a change in the adverts [on Facebook], definitely. But I went in to settings, and removed 'parenting' as a theme…on my adverts. Like I realised after a couple of months that, yeah, it was targeted advertising. … Every user sees the same quantity of adverts, is what it kind of pops up saying. But it says you can opt out of certain ones. I just opted out of parenting, 'cause for quite a few months it was … becoming kinda noticeable. So… since then, I haven't really had any. But I get other random things that maybe aren't as relevant to me, but because I've opted out of parenting adverts
>
> Elizabeth (28; SIMD 6; one baby daughter; U; folk musician)

Elizabeth essentially decided she did not want parenting specific adverts to appear while she used Facebook and would rather be exposed to the same quantity of adverts, but about more general products and services. She decided that she did not want to be a passive audience to computer selected adverts, and actively altered the media content she is exposed to. The adverts she would then be exposed to might well be assumed to be vaguer, for more broad appeal products, perhaps ones suitable for broadcast media. Except, of course, Elizabeth's Facebook activity would identify her, to these algorithms, as someone

interested in things other than parenting and will presumably show her adverts related to those things.

5.4 Perceptions of Media Representations

5.4.1 Introduction

Stuart Hall outlined traditional studies of media representation as largely concerned with accuracy- whether, or to what extent, the depiction is a true reflection of reality (Hall, 1997). Hall argued that this was too literal an interpretation of representation and relied on a fixed, uniform, common understanding of reality. Media images and representations, Hall suggested, are not simply mirrors reflecting reality. They are not standalone, neutral objects, separate from reality. The mirror is part of what it is reflecting. To use horror movie terminology, the call is coming from inside the house. In Hall's argument for representation as constitutive of reality, there is acknowledgement that media representations are not interpreted by people in the same ways.

These sections (5.4.2- 5.4.3) will be structured with reference to these two conceptualisations of media representations: of reflecting reality and as constituent of reality. When talking about the media, it was clearly important for many mothers to consider how accurate it was in reflecting truth, in order to evaluate its reliability and usefulness. However, there were also instances where mothers discussed media representations in ways more aligned to Hall's argument of media as a constituent of reality, not separate from it.

5.4.2 Reflecting Reality

Some mothers used 'the media' as an information source about parenting. These media sources included online parenting forums, Facebook groups and the NHS website. User generated media (including online forums and social media) were clearly important sources of information about parenting for some mothers (Alison, Jessica and Madhuri).

> I'm on a lot of the mums' groups on Facebook, so obviously that's a place I kind of go for advice and that. And I did do a bit a reading, well I do a lot of reading anyway. Like if I get a problem or something, I'll have a look and see what I can do.
>
> Jessica (mid 20s; SIMD 1; two mid aged children, unemployed)

In Jessica's comment, social media can be seen as an easily and quickly accessible source of information, where the information is provided by many other mothers or parents. A

distinction was made though, by some, of the usefulness of user generated media when the information being sought out is in relation to health.

> There's … Mumsnet, [and] Netmums ... But, I do take them with a pinch of salt… I have looked up ... recommendations on like plates or bottles or different things. So, I'll maybe kind of trust sites like that for, for certain things really. And, other things like, I just take things with a pinch of salt kind of thing. I think, you know, everybody's kind of got their own opinion with things as well, so and, you know, everybody's baby's different as well. ... I think sometimes they maybe give advice on things that they shouldn't. Like kind of medical things
>
> Gillian (42; SIMD 6; one baby son; U; works for NHS in social role)

Gillian suggested that because online forums are constituted of contributions from individual parents, this could be useful for sourcing reviews of products, but should be avoided for health advice as individual parents lack authority to give information on this topic. Sarah and Shona argued that the NHS website could be considered a reliable, authoritative source of health advice and dismissed information on online parenting forums, though for different reasons. Shona firstly argued that content on online forums was ill thought out, and therefore untrustworthy. She later argued that some websites were designed to scare the audience. It is, however, unclear which websites she is referring to or whether the capacity of these websites to scare is related to their perceived truthfulness.

> All these like mum forums come up, but most of them I think are rubbish. 'Cause I think it's just people posting questions when they're in a panic, and then other people replying. … But sometimes some of these like, so the Baby Centre or the… I like the NHS website as well, I think that's better. 'Cause yeah, like we were Googling when he had the cold like what we should be doing and things, so… it's handy to have that, and then like know not to panic and things, so… But yeah, I do think, you've kinda got to be careful what you read 'cause some of these sites are just trying to scare you.
>
> Shona (34; SIMD 9; one baby son; U; scientist)

Sarah's comment is a little easier to interpret in that her rationale for dismissal of online forums for health advice is that they present "horror stories". I argue that the reason information added by other parents to an online forum is horrifying is not because Sarah thinks it is untrue, but precisely because she thinks it is true. The horror stories, presumably recounting some harm or injury to their children, are taken as true, but perhaps rare.

> If it's a health thing I'm like, I don't want to read horror stories on Mumsnet or something. So, it's like, straight to NHS, or something like that. If it's more kind of like advice things, I'll just do kinda general Google search and see it might be

> forums like Mumsnet or whatever that comes up. Depends how serious an issue or how definitive an answer I'm looking for
>
> Sarah (30s; SIMD 6; one baby daughter; accountancy related field)

It can be seen from these quotes that for consumer advice, multiple views are useful, that pluralist truths provide a range of options for mothers to choose from to take on board. Where health is concerned, pluralist truths are avoided, in preference for a definitive, authoritative truth. In some ways, this could be seen as a distinction between lay opinion and professional 'facts'. However, this negates scepticism previously discussed in relation to medical authority, where posts on online forums encouraged mothers to read up on information for themselves and disregard advice from doctors on vaccinations.

To a certain extent, there was an endorsement of the idea that there are 'facts' that the media has a role in reporting, and that this is done with varying levels of accuracy. The NHS website, most notably, was considered to accurately present facts about health. Tabloid newspapers, when mentioned, were generally considered untrustworthy. On online forums particularly, there were arguments that tabloids, and some reality television programmes (for example *Benefits Street*), were selective in their publication and promotion of stories, or angles on stories, to give a negative impression of particular groups. These sentiments were echoed by Caroline:

> The articles that I come across, the things that I do read that are from the mainstream media, right across the board, are either perpetuating the, you know, "If you're on benefits, you're a scrounger." Or, "If you're an immigrant, you're here to, you know, live on our benefits and take our jobs."
>
> Caroline (49; SIMD 1; two mid age daughters, one with autism, one adult daughter, currently unemployed though starting university soon)

Paige argued that information being published implied to some people that it was true; that representation falsely implied veracity:

> Well, everywhere on social media, you know, people will read things and stuff and then they'll start to kind of believe it because it's down on paper sort of thing, or, you know, it's over Facebook or over the news or something, when in fact quite a lot of it is emphasised and it's not actually… it's maybe only from one person's point of view.
>
> Paige (23; SIMD 1; one baby son (in care of social services); unemployed though volunteers for charity; care leaver)

In follow up interviews when discussing the trustworthiness of the BBC, nobody considered the BBC to be completely unreliable, though there was variation of opinion.

This ranged from considering the BBC to be generally balanced and reliable (Alison, Stacey, Angela, Fadhila), to arguing that the BBC was biased in terms of partisan politics but was accurate in more everyday reporting (Elizabeth, Julie and Catriona, Lauren).

So far in this section, discussion has focussed on interpretations of the accuracy of representations of 'facts' and 'real life' people. Mothers online and in interviews also talked about fictionalised representations and how realistic they were. In interviews, I asked mothers for examples of realistic depictions of parenting. Some mothers (Caroline, Stacey) reported not being able to think of a realistic depiction of parenting in any media type. Sarah argued that representations of celebrity parents' lives were unrelatable, though not necessarily untrue. The only common realistic media representations, mentioned by more than one mother was Netflix television series *The Letdown* (Alison, Julie and Catriona, Lauren, Shona (though has not watched it yet)) and the BBC television series *Motherland* (Alison, Lauren). According to the broadcasters of these programmes, *Motherland* is a sitcom which "explores the ups and down of modern middle-class parenting mixed in with competitive friendships, school-gate rivalry… and lots of red wine" (BBC, 2017). And in *The Letdown*, a new mother "joins a new-parents support group, where she makes some quirky friends facing various challenges and life changes" (Netflix, undated). Alison's description of these television programmes aligned well with the broadcasters':

> There's one on Netflix just now called 'The Letdown'. Which is really, really good, and I think… Kinda spoke to me a lot in terms of, "That's spot on." You know? And… it is quite negative, you know? But, just in terms of things being difficult, but not completely... And, there was another quite good one 'Motherland' I think it was called from the BBC. ...That was more I think to do with the kinda social aspect of mothers and parent groups ... the kind of competitive groups of parents that you get ... I think a lot of that ran quite true in terms of people that I've met, you know?
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

A central theme of both programmes is that parenting is difficult, and stressful, and that it completely alters all other social interactions. That there is a widespread social view that parenting is difficult has been argued by parenting culture theorists: "[There is an] idea that parenting is difficult for everybody… and that raising children is a task that most ordinary adults require external support and expertise to perform adequately" (MacVarish, 2010, para 5.1, cited Faircloth, 2014, page 161). As I mentioned in discussion of humour in a previous chapter, jokes clearly rely on a shared understanding of concepts and context. The jokes in these television series rely on the assumption of shared social understandings of

motherhood, mothers' relationships, and how that fits in to wider social contexts. In his review of *The Letdown*, Buckmaster notes:

> The comedy often involves taking an event or concept hooked to the parental experience then lampooning its place in a wider context, ie via misunderstanding. At a dinner out with friends, Audrey, who has [her baby] with her, argues with a mate (Gareth Davies) about the number of glasses of champagne there should be on the table. He says four, not five, which she interprets as insisting she shouldn't drink while breastfeeding. Audrey cuts off his counter-protests midsentence, forcing him to suddenly exclaim that he just got out of rehab and doesn't want to fall off the wagon.
>
> Buckmaster, 2017

In *Motherland*, similar themes of parenting being difficult, altering interpersonal relationships, and motherhood being humorously chaotic are also used as tropes:

> Motherland's perspective is undeniably that of the comfortably-off London mum ... but even within that specific stratum there are variations … [The characters include] super stressed Julia, … Alpha mum-turned-mumpreneur Amanda … [who is] relentlessly judgmental about everyone else's choices. Single parent Liz (Diane Morgan) is a heroic source of dry wit and ingenious parenting shortcuts, but her income source remains mysterious.
>
> Jones, 2019

These jokes and tropes rely not just of shared understandings of motherhood, but of particular, urban, Anglophone, middle class understandings of motherhood. All of the mothers who cited these programmes as realistic representations of motherhood are university educated, professional women. These programmes may reflect aspects of their experiences as mothers which might not feature in other, more working class, mothers' lives. In a previous section I noted the connection Lauren made between her choices of activities and social context. I think her reflections about these programmes and taste is particularly pertinent when these previous comments are considered:

> I think it's maybe just because of my particular taste, that … The ones that I have found recently that are like the couple of comedies that I sort of feel like they hit quite close to home.
>
> Lauren (36; SIMD 4; one baby son; U; museum professional)

These two programmes use a sort of gallows humour to bounce off an apparently common perception of parenting as difficult and chaotic. Some other mothers in interviews, who did not mention these programmes, did cite the lack of 'warts and all' representations as why certain media was unrealistic. This was particularly true of opinions of representations on social media. A common opinion expressed was that some people only made positive,

happy, perfectionist posts about their life as a parent, which was felt to be unrealistic of the difficulties and stresses of parenting.

> Fae other mums, like there's so much competition. Everyone's always posting things [on social media] to just make themselves look amazing. … Nobody posts like the screaming toddler that won't behave properly
>
> Iona (21; SIMD 2; one baby daughter; university student)

While some argued that these unrealistic, perfectionist posts were prompted by competitiveness, Gillian argued that there may be commercial influences too:

> You can see that, they're maybe just posting the better parts of their day, and you know, the food they put out all looks perfect, and I think that makes people feel that their life has to be like that, But... I think some are real and some not. And, I think some, you can kind of see that obviously they're paid money to push certain products and things
>
> Gillian (42; SIMD 6; one baby son; U; works for NHS in social role)

5.4.3 Representations as Constituents of Reality

Hall's call to view media images not as reflections of reality but as part of it came before the advent of social media, but arguably, media images on social media provide some of the most literal examples of this. Iona and Gillian described representations, on social media, of people's parenting practices and behaviours. In the quotes, Iona and Gillian considered how accurate a portrayal these images are of parenting behaviours. The images though are not just reflections of, but are an element of, these people's parenting behaviours. Following an analysis of Taiwanese parenting blogs, Yi-tao Lee argued that the blogs operate as a "digital pushchair", where fathers parade themselves and display behaviours (as they might do in a 'real life' setting, pushing their baby in a pushchair), in the hope they are considered good fathers (Lee, 2018). The parents posting on social media are curating images of their life as parents, but these images do not merely reflect their lives, they are a constituent part of it. I argue that in Gillian's comment about the commercial influence on these posts, there is a hint of the multiple possibilities of meaning that may be considered when viewing media images. "Hall shows that an image can have many different meanings and that there is no guarantee that images will work in the way we think they will when we create them" (Jhally, 1997). It is not just the creators of the social media posts for whom the representations of their parenting life become constituent parts of their lives. The representations and engagement with them also become part of the viewer's realities. Iona and Gillian's activities of viewing, searching, considering, and even disregarding these media representations form part of their lives and realities too.

Jhally pre-empted a criticism of Hall's arguments for the complexity of representation (that studies of complexity negate consideration of power in and of the media). Jhally argued:

> Hall understands that communication is always linked with power and that those groups who wield power in a society influence what gets represented through the media. Hall wants to hold both these ideas: that messages work in complex ways, and that they are always connected with the way that power operates in any society, together at the same time.
>
> Jhally, 1997

Of the BBC, Julie argued it "is supportive of whoever's currently in government at the time, it's how their bias works, so they're very pro-Tory at the moment". Furedi and other writers on parental determinism have argued that ideas about a causal relationship between the minutiae of parental action and harm to children and therefore society are intertwined with neoliberal ideas of personal responsibility and low state support. Neoliberal ideas have been observed to be prevalent in the government of the UK (to varying degrees) for the past several decades. I don't suggest that the government directly controls what is represented in the media in the UK. However, I do suggest that the government, and other groups with power, have an important and influential role in setting agendas for which issues are represented, and how they are framed. Media influence, and influences on the media, are complex and cyclic and will be discussed more in the next section. The point here is that parental determinism is a pervasive and powerful idea, and as seen in literature reviews, features in media in various ways. Representations of parental determinism were observed and reflected on by mothers in interviews.

> I think what the media often … well, I often get the impression that there's this way to do it and, or if your child doesn't turn out like this, or, then there's something wrong or you're doing something wrong.
>
> Annalie (late 30s/ early 40s; SIMD 5; one baby daughter; classical musician; from South Africa)

> The one that springs to mind [when thinking of the contexts in which she has heard the phrase "I blame the parents"] is Jon Venables and Robert Thompson, you know, evil… A lot of what I read, and on parenting sites as well, reading parenting forums, people … want you to blame the parents in that kind of case because these kids couldn't have developed these behaviours in a vacuum.
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

> It's always kinda depicted as a real struggle or you're always frazzled or … you just can't get it right almost. ... When I think generally about 'Malcolm in the Middle' and the parenting that went on in 'Desperate Housewives', it was always how much people were messing up either by trying too hard or being a bit too

> career motivated or … it's always too much of something. But then ... I suppose that's 'cause there's no such thing as getting it right.
>
> Julie (mid 30s; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; U; police officer)

Annalie, Alison and Julie all recounted media representations which support a causal association between parental action and harm to children, and in Alison's case possibly extending to harm to society. In their comments, there are also ideas related to blame, responsibility, and that parenting is difficult and may present tensions with other aspects of life, like employment. The tension between attention to parenting and to promotion of employment is difficult to reconcile within neoliberal ideology. Proponents of neoliberalism would presumably support widespread employment to encourage individualised wealth generation and discourage state support. However, parental determinism is neoliberal in the directing of responsibility to individual parents to cure society's ills. Caroline argued that there were prominent media messages about parenting which were in direct contrast to those expressed by Annalie, Alison and Julie:

> I think that the pressure that the media puts onto parents now is appalling. ... I think that … if the media is to be believed there is no value placed on the family anymore. I think you're only deemed by society to be valuable if you are working yourself into an early grave. … For people who do choose to stay with their child for any period of time … the way that they're portrayed by the media, I think is absolutely appalling. You know, you're looked upon and outright called a scrounger or lazy … and I don't believe that there is any value placed on raising decent children that are going to be our future.
>
> Caroline (49; SIMD 1; two mid age daughters, one with autism, one adult daughter, currently unemployed though starting university soon)

In some ways, Caroline implied personal endorsement of parental determinism but argued prevalent messages in the media are opposed to such ideologies. Rather than interpreting the same media messages differently to these other mothers I have quoted, I think the contrast between the comments highlights the complexity of media messages. There is not one basic message, but rather myriad, and they may be interpreted differently. Differing experiences may play a role in varying interpretations. Caroline was relatively young when she had her first child and after the birth, worked in childcare. She became dissatisfied with the dynamic of time and attention between her working life and her role as a parent. When she had more children several years later, with her partner Gary, this experience seemingly influenced her decision to stay at home with the children, while Gary worked. One of her children with Gary is autistic. I argue that all these things, which she mentioned at other points of the interview, have influenced her perception of prominent media messages. She

qualifies her already cited comment by going on to recount a conversation she had with another parent. The other parent is a mother of a child with Asperger's syndrome, who was apparently feeling pressured to return to work, but who wanted to stay at home to support her daughter.

> I said to her, "...I think that what you're doing is much more valuable because your wee one needs you." And, if you're there and she has that solid base, she'll become a much more confident adult, and be able to be much more self-sufficient. … My issue is the pressure that people are put under and feel like they have to [work] and they have to leave their child behind or leave their child in the care of another person that they don't know, … especially over any sort of transitional periods for children with extra needs, if that wee girl's mum is there and she knows that she's there and she has that stability and she'll balance out, the chances are she'll then go on to be a much more productive member of society. Once her mum knows that she's stable and secure, she'll find something to do which will add a bit of, you know, value and productivity. If she's not there, and that wee one has to deal with that lack of security, that lack of stability, there is a far greater chance that she will then ultimately continue to need support and help, which adds to the pressure of society in general and I just, I feel that it's not benefiting anyone to force every single person to go out to work and not appreciate the value of people caring for their own child and looking after their own child and creating, you know, a progressive, valuable society
>
> Caroline (49; SIMD 1; two mid age daughters, one with autism, one adult daughter, currently unemployed though starting university soon)

Caroline presents a complex view of considerations of value in society. Based on other comments Caroline made about media representations, particularly in relation to overtly political issues (like Scottish independence), I am inclined to think that Caroline interprets the relationships between society, media and power in much complex ways. This is perhaps demonstrated with her initial comment "*if the media is to be believed,* there is no value placed on the family anymore" (emphasis mine).

5.5 Media Influence

5.5.1 Media Influence on Behaviours and Identities

Of particular importance to discussion in this section are Caroline's comments on pressure from the media. Caroline seemed to directly equate media messages with influence. At other points in the interview, she argued that she is immune from social influence.

In the section on key sources of influence on parenting practices, I reported that several mothers (Gillian, Angela, Stacey, Jessica and to a lesser extent, Rebecca) mentioned the internet as a source of parenting advice and that some other mothers (Fadhila, Julie and

Catriona, Annalie, Madhuri, Sarah and Sinead) used the internet as a trouble shooting tool to find information to address issues as they arose. In addition to this there was also discussion in interviews of relatively more 'passive' influence from the media. Some mothers recounted instances where their behaviour had been influenced by media which they accessed without the intention of getting specific information. These instances included Gillian who regularly viewed the Instagram stories of various people, including some other parents. Of these stories, she reflected on the intimacy of viewing these aspects of people's lives, many of whom she had never met, calling it "strange", while recounting how she might watch the behaviours of other parents and take cues from them.

Julie and Catriona, and Lauren all recounted reading about accidents and harm coming to children, from sources they came across in quite happenstance ways, and altering their parenting behaviours:

> Me- Are there things that you've seen in the media about parenting that has made you reflect on the things that you do as a parent?
>
> Catriona- I suppose … news articles, like our parents will send us news articles or things they've heard. That's a big thing.
>
> Julie- Oh, yeah. That's been happening a lot.
>
> Catriona- It's like oh, you can't take her in the car seat for thirty minutes or they'll die a horrible death.
>
> …
>
> Me- And so do you think that you, you change what you do because of some of those things?
>
> Catriona - Yeah.
>
> Catriona (mid 30s; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; U; psychologist)
>
> Julie (mid 30s; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; U; police officer)

In the media reports Julie and Catriona describe, there is a sense that minor, accidental actions or inactions of parents can cause dire harm to children. Clearly this is very much in line with ideas of parental determinism. Julie and Catriona at times made light of some of these media images, joking about constant catastrophizing. Though they did amend their behaviours, they seemed to be able to brush off these messages without any particular emotional effects. When Lauren recalled reading about an accident that had resulted in the death of a child, there was more of a sense that this resulted in some form of hypervigilance. Lauren talks about things giving her a "fright" and that this makes them

stay in her thoughts, which I think does indicate some sort of an internalising and emotional response.

> I read a story about a lady, who, it was through an accident her son had died and I think that probably made me think that week … about all the, like, little things that ... you could mistakenly do and end up in tragedy. … I mean, the bad thing about it is it's quite often when it's a negative story, then it gives you a bit of a fright and it makes you think about it. … I suppose sometimes you also see ... positive things in the, in your newsfeed ... like tips … so sometimes I might read ... that and it might influence me as well, but I guess the ones that stick most in your mind are the ones where ... it's kind of given you a bit of a fright
>
> Lauren (36; SIMD 4; one baby son; U; museum professional)

Shona recounted an instance when she saw, via social media, a parenting action made by a friend, which she would not otherwise have thought about, but which she decided she would like to do herself.

> One of the girls posted [on Facebook] pictures of her like newborn photo shoot type thing. And I was like, I didn't want a newborn photo shoot with him, 'cause I think … it's just not my style. But then it made me think, well actually, I would like some photos when he's sitting up by himself and like to get a proper one done. And it might not have clicked with me to sort of think and organise it unless I'd seen that.
>
> Shona (34; SIMD 9; one baby son; U; scientist)

This perhaps falls into a category of quite a minor behavioural influence. I was interested though in the initial rejection of the idea of a baby photoshoot because it was "not [her] style". There is a hint in this phrase of links between these small actions and ideas of broader identities. There were other instances in interviews where mothers talked about the relationship between media images and their identities.

> That show 'Mother Land' … you watch that and you think, "I don't want to turn into that kind of mother, who is really competitive and who is screaming at her child to "You must, go and conjugate those Latin verbs when you're three years old"" etc. You know, and but is trying to be very visibly the best mother, you know, like feeling like, "Oh God, I really don't wanna be like that." Like, and I need to make sure that I'm not sort of performatively, or kind of trying to perform this amazing mother thing, because it looks ridiculous, you know?
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

Alison can see in *Motherland* depictions of motherhood which are close enough to her own experience to offer a glimpse of how things could be, and of how she could be. The framing of motherhood Alison described fits well into intensive mothering ideals. Alison presumably recognised these ideals as prevalent, which is why she thought the programme

realistic. That intensive mothering ideals are being depicted in the media though allows her a chance to view them from an outside perspective. Perhaps this separation- that she is not looking at *her* life, but something similar, allows space to reflect on how she would want, or not want, her life and behaviour to appear from the outside. Seale argued that individuals construct the self and "stor[ies] of their selves" through reflexive use of "culturally available narratives, stories, scripts, discourses, systems of knowledge or, in more politically oriented analyses, ideologies" (Seale, 2003, page 415). He also argued that the media provides the largest repository of available cultural scripts. In Alison's comment, there can be seen a reflection on a cultural script, presented in the media, and indication of how this may influence the construction Alison's self, of elements of her identity.

Sinead also discussed media framings of mothers:

> Sinead- I think it's impossible not to be [influenced by media framings of good motherhood] … I think… growing up in Ireland it's kind of similar to Scotland it's like, you know, being a mother is put on a pedestal, and … it's … the most meaningful thing you can do. You know, like in the media in Ireland, like whenever someone dies, if they have kids, it's always, "Mother of three passes away" and that kind of thing. And like, yes, it's tragic the children are left without a mother, but it's not like, you know, "registered nurse dies," or "strong local tennis player dies."
>
> Me- So, it almost becomes their primary identity?
>
> Sinead- It's your whole identity and the more children you have. If it's like, "mother of five" it's like more of a tragedy kind of thing. And, it's just these very, not so subtle messages of your worth is how many children you have and…
>
> Me- But then do you ever see a sort of kind of flip to that where, a mother that has quite a lot of children might be [vilified]?
>
> Sinead- I think that's kind of stronger here. I think that's kind of the whole British, oh, "welfare mother" type thing. I mean, I think that exists in Ireland, but I think because it's so long influenced by Catholicism, I think there are more positive undertones there, or there were more positive kind of undertones there to having this big family.

Sinead (30s; SIMD 6; one baby son; U (doctorate); paediatric mental health practitioner; from Ireland)

Sinead argued that Irish media framings of motherhood reflected a culturally prevalent view, influenced by religion, that motherhood was a centrally important identity. Sinead does not dispute that these media framings are reflective of prevalent societal views. She does not dispute the veracity, but does seem to resent it. She resents the idea that motherhood trumps any other experiences or accomplishments, in the framing of identity in the minds of others.

Sinead argues that it is "impossible not to be" influenced by media framings of motherhood but does not really explain how she is influenced. The lack of explanation for the mechanism of influence resonates with comments from some other mothers. Alison, Shona, Gillian and Paige all argued that the media influence was not necessarily something consciously controlled, but rather that the prevalence of media images meant that influence was unavoidable in some, subliminal ways.

> The media says don't do something, everybody just doesn't do it. … Somebody sees [a media message] and, "Oh, do you know what? Because that says that's good for my kid, that's what I'm gonna do." It's like as if they put it into their brain almost. … The only way I can describe it is, see like smokers for instance, right? Say you watch a whole film, right, and the whole way through it, every time they smoke, instantly through your head, it goes "I want to smoke." Do you know? And you've not thought about it in the last hour.
>
> Paige (23; SIMD 1; one baby son (in care of social services); unemployed though volunteers for charity; care leaver)

Paige seemingly includes herself as possibly being influenced by subliminal media messages. Some other mothers were more resistant to the idea that they may be influenced by the media. Shona refuted conscious influence, but conceded to the possibility of some influence:

> I don't think [I am particularly influenced by television]. Or at least I don't think I am, although I probably am like subconsciously.
>
> Shona (34; SIMD 9; one baby son; U; scientist)

Gillian argued that due to her age and professional experience, she was less susceptible to the influence of media messages than others might be, but again, conceded the possibility of some subliminal influence.

> I think there probably is [pressure from social or other media to parent in certain ways] … I don't know if I've kind of fallen to it so much, maybe because I am a bit older and then, you know, I work for the NHS, and I work with families and things as well.
>
> […]
>
> For some things I probably do, sub-consciously, I don't really, you know, do it because I've seen it in the media or different things, but … I could definitely see how some people can be more influenced than other people.
>
> Gillian (42; SIMD 6; one baby son; U; works for NHS in social role)

5.5.2 Media Influence on Others

Julie and Catriona similarly suggested variations in media influence, though their argument for why they were less susceptible to commercial media messages was education.

> Julie- I see it with adverts like Aptamil … [the] follow-on milk and it's, it's just propaganda, it's like 'breast is best so when your child is ready take our formula.' And then they just totally twist … a thing that you keep hearing repeated, 'breastfeeding's good, breastfeeding's good, bre-'. So therefore our milk's good. And it's just total flawed logic. But you can just see how it suckers folk in, going 'oh well they obviously know the research.'
>
> Catriona- Yeah, but it annoys me 'cause we're very fortunate in terms of the way we've been educated and the things that we understand about these things on a kinda wider level. But there's a lotta people that either don't have the time or just have never, wouldn't have necessarily had the experience
>
> Catriona (mid 30s; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; U; psychologist)
>
> Julie (mid 30s; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; U; police officer)

Iona's partner is from Pakistan and has leg damage caused by Polio. She talked about being concerned and angry about social media messages discouraging use of the Polio vaccine (because of fears it contains pork). Her specific concern was that this had an influence on a population level in Pakistan and accounted for widespread refusal of the vaccine. She implied that the Pakistani population, which is majority Muslim, are particularly affected by fears the vaccine may contain pork but that her experience of a relationship with somebody directly affected by Polio meant that she had seen the harms of not vaccinating.

Gillian and Catriona both argued that other parents may be more susceptible than them as they may not have the same educational or professional experiences. Iona argued that religion meant that some populations have particular concerns which may be targeted by media messages. She argued that personal experience of the harms of preventable contagious disease mean that she is resistant to media messages discouraging vaccinations. Gillian suggested that her being older may make her less gullible than younger adults. Various mothers, in interviews, expressed concerns that children may be taken in by, and harmed, by particular media messages. Rebecca, for example, was concerned about the influence, on children, of seeing an Instagram post by Kim Kardashian where she advertised a weight loss lolly:

> I suppose I didn't always 100% look up to her, but I think a lot of people did, like, youngsters have been looking up to her thinking "oh well, you know, she's a mum, she's". Usually the things that she promotes aren't anywhere near as bad as what I

> saw … I look at it now and think "that's, kind of lost a bit of respect for her" because it's not something you want any kids … to be looking at that … And she's just encouraging people, like young kids, to think about, you know, their body, and not eating. And then, it escalates after that.
>
> Rebecca (early 30s; SIMD 5; one baby son; U; hospitality training)

Catriona disapproved of a media report about an Olympic speed skater who self-harmed as a way of coping with difficulties in elite sport. Catriona was concerned about potential harm such uncritical reporting of self-harm may cause to teenage audiences. I asked Catriona why she thought teenagers specifically might be affected by these types of messages and she responded:

> It was almost like an advert for self-harm, that was how I felt watching that. … [The media producers] just don't understand the significance of… I work with teenagers that they would be doing things like that, that maybe would be just like, "oh, she's doing it too".
>
> […]
>
> It's kind of like what people say about suicide, it's like you're not going to cause someone to think about doing that if they're not already. The problem is the population, whether they're teenagers or… It tends to be older [?children] … but like the sort of early teenagers who are maybe already doing that, potentially it causes a problem here. Or adults that are like yeah, people likely to do it.
>
> Catriona (mid 30s; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; U; psychologist)

I think Catriona was suggesting that these messages are most effective in encouraging self-harm in people who already self-harm and that this behaviour is most prevalent in teenagers.

I have already discussed (in Chapter 4) concerns expressed by some mothers about potential harms to their children caused by parents posting images of them on social media. Another potential harm caused by the media to children, cited by mothers on online forums and one mother (Rebecca) in interviews, was to do with the amount of "screen time" babies were exposed to. The concern with screen time is not really about representations, but technology, so not directly relevant to this project. In relation to harms from media images, there was some concern expressed about children being exposed to violent media images. On online forums, one poster was suggested that this type of content was upsetting to children, while another argued that children may emulate violence seen in the media, causing harm to society- an argument aligned to 'video nasties' debates of the 1990s. Alison made similar suggestions in relation to discussion of children who have committed

violent crime. She suggested that the reasons, as well as parental action, that children might commit crime were myriad, and included emulating media images.

In an online forum thread about television media images which might be upsetting for children, one poster suggested that these images could be used as a prompt for discussion with their children about social issues. On a different thread about the *Daily Mail*, there were suggestions that the newspaper could be used as a prompt for discussion with children about media representations and bias, with an implication that this may have a positive, educational impact on their children.

Several mothers in interviews referenced media impacts on a wider level, through normalisation and representation. Angela argued that the media can have effects on children, and how they see themselves in the world, through what she called normalisation, of disability:

> I think it's important that we see disability as being normal, because it is normal … It's not normalised, and really, it should be, because there's lots of people in our society that are disabled, and it should be depicted more. ... It's great to see people with disability starting to be shown on TV, and be normalised ... how are kids supposed to learn inclusivity, and not to discriminate, if they're not seeing that on a daily basis? ... So, for me, I would say that there's no' enough of it on the TV. There's no' enough normalisation of disability.

Angela (39; SIMD 2; two mid aged sons, both with behavioural conditions; U; works for parenting organisation)

Caroline talked about the media showing "normal" family and social relationships and that this might make people feel unusual in their family set up because their relationships are not like those shown in soap operas.

> A huge amount of programmes at the minute … whether it be soap operas or whatever … the… happy family, is very rarely depicted, very rarely. It seems that programmes even look at, you know, broken homes and, you know, parents that are fighting over custody and, you know, children that are wayward because, you know, mum's always at work or whatever. … I feel that … kind of influence … is actually almost subliminally saying to you that, being in a stable relationship where you have children and you're all happy together is quite unusual. And, you know, that you're not the norm now, where that used to be the thing, now it's not seen as being commonplace ... But, I don't think that many, even programmes, even fictional programmes depict that kind of scenario. I think it's very rare that you'll come across something that's showing a solid unit as a family.

Caroline (49; SIMD 1; two mid age daughters, one with autism, one adult daughter, currently unemployed though starting university soon)

Caroline argued that it was important for people to see media images of people working through relationship difficulties and ultimately staying together, rather than separating or divorcing but she does not really explain why this might be important. Perhaps there is a suggestion that it might encourage people to stay together. However, this is not made explicit by Caroline.

> Fictional programmes, even dramas, soap operas, the kind of message that they're sending is that you don't have to work at it any more. You know, relationships don't come easy and they do take work. But … rarely, in my own experience, is there a depiction of people having their struggles, but still coming through to the other side of it, and that's reality, I think. … When I say, "Seen as the norm," I don't mean that because I don't want people to feel under pressure the opposite way where if they're desperately unhappy they feel like they can't get out of the relationship because society will judge. I don't know. I just, I think that there should be a bit more emphasis on, "Yes, you can have hard times and nobody in a relationship is ever going to be happy with each other a hundred percent of the time."
>
> Caroline (49; SIMD 1; two mid age daughters, one with autism, one adult daughter, currently unemployed though starting university soon)

Caroline suggests that the ubiquity of media images of relationship breakdowns implies that people breaking up rather than staying together is the norm. There is an implicit suggestion that this may have implications for society in the images promoting break ups. Rebecca seemed to present a contrasting view; she argued that media images, particularly in television adverts, only really showed families with two parents and children and that this may be disheartening for single parents and people without children, and not be considered realistic or representative of the diversity of family make ups.

Paige also talked about common media representations of single mothers. She argued that single mothers were often vilified in the media, that this led to social criticism and therefore may have implications for the wellbeing of single mothers.

Aroofa, talking about representations of Muslim people in US media, argued that the media sometimes provides the only available impressions of particular people or social groups and that negative media representations can influence widespread views and lead to persecution of the group represented. She argued that media images may be particularly influential for young people.

> I think that [US media representation of Muslim people] definitely has [an] impact on a large scale because someone who is not educated or … someone who is a teenager … whatever the media's portraying he will, you know, accept the stuff and then he will have, he or she will have the feelings against the Muslim that

> "okay Muslims are like that". … I have met a lot of people who doesn't know much … about me but … what they have was an impression from the media ... But when you talk to them then you are able to convince that, okay, like all the Muslims cannot be categorised into one group ... You don't know … who is watching the news or reading the news, if he or she is someone who is not mature enough … So definitely it will, you know, ignite, it will bring out, like it will create a really negative impression or if we are seeing some incidences where the Muslims were attacked … this is all because of the impression which media has created.
>
> Aroofa (26; SIMD 1; one baby son; U; PhD student; from Pakistan)

There has been discussion and commentary in online magazines about the importance of media representation; for example, Buzzfeed's *23 Reminders That Representation Is Everything* (Bennett, 2016) and Vice's *Why Seeing Yourself Represented on Screen Is So Important* (Lawson, 2018). In these pieces, the discussion of media representation is largely around two related issues. Firstly, the importance of a diversity of characters in the media, and secondly, the importance of positive portrayals of people in marginalised groups. The importance of this is seemingly for people also in these marginalised groups, who are exposed to these media images. It is often argued that these media images and characters may serve as role models. Laverne Cox, a transgender, black, actress, has been asked in press interviews about being described as a role model. She rejects this term, calling it "presumptuous". Instead, she prefers the idea of a "possibility model" (Radiotimes, 2015). I too think this is a useful term. This is partly because, like Cox, I am sceptical of the idea that a person or character in the media is simply copied, but also because a possibility model may be useful for an audience of people outside particular minority groups. The media offers opportunity for exposure to people and groups outside of people's ordinary social spheres and with an intimacy which could potentially encourage understanding and empathy. A similar sentiment was expressed by Lauren:

> I guess having more sort of rounded … characters that show a diversity of experiences … I think, you know, that actually that could do a lot to improve acceptance or understanding in the wider society
>
> […]
>
> You often hear like maybe a character in a soap, I don't know, say a transgender character … that that might, you know, change people's perceptions or that maybe it can make people more aware of, you know, different experiences that they might not have met somebody that's transgender before
>
> Lauren (36; SIMD 4; one baby son; U; museum professional)

In this sub-section on media effects on others, there has been discussion of arguments that other parents' beliefs and practices may be more influenced than their own because of

differences in experience related to education, employment, religion, disease, or age. In interviews, there were arguments that younger people may be more susceptible to media messages and that this may be harmful to them and society. There was also discussion of the potential power of media on a wider level, in terms of normalisation and positive representation of diverse social groups. That media can have power across a wide, societal level was also referenced in relation to politics, for example Julie: "I mean look at the bloomin' EU thing and the referendum. The media did influence people there".

5.5.3 Audience influence on media producers

Seale argued that the relationship between media producers and audiences could be viewed as a feedback loop (2003, page 516). Media producers do not simply devise content which is beamed to audiences and who are duly influenced in behaviours and beliefs. Media audiences have an influence on media producers; on what is produced, and when and how it is delivered.

Mothers online described a number of ways in which they, as a media audience, could exert some influence over media producers. The most common route cited was via complaints, either directly to the media producers or to a regulatory body. Another common way was related to consumer demand. An online forum poster argued that the reason for common, contemporary, media reporting of sexual offences is not because the instances of these crimes occurring were rising but because of public interest in salacious content; essentially a 'sex sells' argument. In a different online forum thread, initiated by a father complaining about gendered stereotyping in parenting media, some respondents empathised and suggested he address these issues with some form of campaigning or activism. It was unclear how this campaigning could be done, perhaps with an implication that this would be done via direct complaints to media producers. One poster suggested he start producing media himself, online, in the hope that this may encourage other parents, and perhaps influence more mainstream media producers.

Widespread use of the internet and the development of internet-based media sharing have radically changed the relationship between media audiences and producers. Blogging, videoblogging and podcasting can all be done from people's homes, avoiding the structures and barriers of traditional media. The advent of internet-based DIY media production has changed and complicated the feedback loop theorised by Seale in 2003. The mothers cited in this study did not seem to be involved with the production of media like podcasts, blogs or video blogs. They did all though deliberately contribute content to the internet (either through social media or forum posts). In this sense they were all media

producers. Internet forums and social media are all media completely (other than the platform infrastructure) produced by the audience. The feedback loop Seale described is a dot when this type of media is considered.

The internet, particularly social media, has also changed the relationship between the audiences and producers of more traditional media. Complaints and comments are no longer communicated in private correspondence but can be voiced using social media, and essentially put into the public domain without any editorial control from media producers (which they had in newspaper letter sections, for example). Reviews of media are no longer exclusively written by established critics and published and broadcast in review sections. Comments and opinions of media content are expressed numerously and instantly on social media, sometimes in real time with the broadcast. There is also opportunity for direct conversation with traditional media producers, via social media. On an online forum discussion about books related to adoption, it was mentioned that one recommended author interacted with readers via Twitter and engaged with discussion about adoption.

Of relevance to the shifted dynamic between media producers and audiences brought about by social media, there were instances where mothers in interviews talked about being conscious of the potential impact to other people's wellbeing that their social media posts could have:

> I don't typically post a Mother's Day or Father's Day tribute because … you could be a child of a parent that has gone, or you could want to be a parent of a child that you don't have, so I think that's an even broader one in terms of people being affected by it. … I think the offspring thing is the biggest like sensitive point for social media, if that's the right way to say it … like I've got a contact on Facebook, a [man] who lost a wee one … I'm very conscious of him.
>
> Elizabeth (29; SIMD 6; two baby daughters; U; folk musician)

Elizabeth empathised with people in different situations to her, whose wellbeing may be affected by media images. She argued that public discussion of parent-child relationships may be a sensitive area, and I think makes an implicit acknowledgement of the power of media images to affect wellbeing. There is also an overt acknowledgement of her power as a media producer to affect other's wellbeing.

In discussion of Facebook parenting groups and perception of them as, at times, highly critical environments, Jade acknowledged the possible impact on other mothers, particularly if they are socially isolated. In contrast to Elizabeth though, she suggested she does not have the power to mitigate this impact.

> Jade- But you can't go on and defend anybody because then there's twenty million people coming back at you like "who do you think you are?" and that sort of thing. I feel bad for people, especially if they've put something up and then there's not as many people like that to defend them because they must feel really alone.
>
> Karen- And you're thinking that person's not got anybody else to ask
>
> Jade- Exactly
>
> Jade (mid 20s; SIMD 1; one mid age son, two stepchildren: one mid age, one teenage; unemployed)
>
> Karen (facilitator of employability group, present during interview)

Across various threads on the online parenting forum, there were several instances of discussion or implication of perceived impacts of forum content on other's wellbeing. In response to a post describing a stressful situation, there was a comment with a simple commiseration, and an addition that the responder felt she couldn't read and not comment. There were some posts which referred to an idea that the forum should have a primary function of mothers supporting other mothers, and therefore rebuking some other, more critical posts. In contrast to these posts, there were numerous others which implored users to not be oversensitive or take things personally. These largely focussed on an argument that people expressing opinion should not be perceived as attacking others. Within this argument there is an implicit dismissal of the feelings of those who may be offended and therefore, I argue, denial of the power of media on wellbeing.

5.6 Analysis

Jhally, in reference to the influence of the media, commented:

> Marshall McLuhan once said he wasn't sure who discovered water, but he was pretty sure it wasn't the fish. In other words, when we are immersed in something … we may come to accept [it] as just part of the real and natural world. We just swim through [it], unthinkingly absorbing [it] as fish in water.
>
> Jhally, 1997

It is very difficult to examine one's social context while being immersed in it. It is difficult to critically examine the "water" that surrounds us because we cannot step out of it and look at it as an observer. In asking mothers about the influences to their parenting practices and identities, this was essentially what I was asking them to do. For all the difficulty of the task, I would argue that good insight has been gained into this complex matrix of social influence.

Scholars of parenting culture, including Hays and Lee, have argued that appropriate contemporary parenting is expert-guided. Data from interviews and online forums suggest complex considerations of legitimacy, authority, and trust with a blurred relationship between lay and professional childrearing expertise. For many mothers interviewed, advice from professionals with relevant expertise was clearly important. This seemed to be particularly in relation to medical matters. Several mothers mentioned child psychology, and some mentioned attachment parenting, but nobody identified themselves with a particular named ideology or parenting style they adhered to completely. Sinead was perhaps the closest in her study of attachment parenting and related psychological theories, but she did not carry out all behaviours she associated with the style (like co-sleeping) and was critical of elements of the social context such parenting styles are situated in. There was scarce reference to specific parenting experts, though attendance of parent training and/ or support groups, presumably facilitated by individuals with some form of professionally legitimised parenting expertise, was almost universal. Many mothers sought advice from friends and family members (lay sources), but some of this advice contained explicit references to parenting experts, or psychology. Nobody mentioned Bowlby by name, but in references to bonding, there is perhaps an indication of saturation of some of his arguments in lay conceptualisations of appropriate parenting. There were references to looking at the parenting of pre-existing friends', and seeking their advice, but there was also reference to the influence, advice and support of new friends, brought together by the common experience of becoming a mother. These new relationships were often formed at parenting groups, and so may share similar exposure to particular parenting ideologies, depending on how the groups were facilitated.

Based on the commonality of reference to it during interviews, it is clear that a central influence on parenting practices and beliefs is the experience of being parented and reflecting upon those experiences. Evidence from previous observational studies have shown intergenerational influence on parenting behaviours (Madden et al, 2015).

Most mothers interviewed (Julie and Catriona, Rebecca, Madhuri, Lauren, Caroline, Sarah, Aroofa, Angela, Fadhila, Jade and Amber) wanted to emulate at least some aspects of the parenting they experienced as children. This contrasts with several mothers (Alison, Annalie, Stacey, Iona, Paige, Sinead, and Jessica) who wanted to avoid some of the parenting behaviours and beliefs their parents had demonstrated. While all mothers mentioned multiple sources of influence and advice, it is important to consider that the mothers who wanted to avoid emulating their parents' parenting are unlikely to want, or be

able to, seek advice from their parents contemporaneously. Such advice seeking from parents is a key source of influence for some of the other mothers, which is not utilised by these mothers.

Owing to the focus of this project overall, there has been particular attention paid to the influence of the media, and specific questions asked about it. Even without this focus, it seems likely, given the contemporary media landscape, that the media would be cited as an influence. There were instances where mothers cited media as a first reference when seeking advice about parenting. For the mothers posting on the online forum, media use clearly formed a part of their (parenting) lives. Use of social media, of some variety, was universal amongst mothers interviewed. Further than this, there were hints that other social influences on their parenting, for example the influence of friends, family, social norms, parenting experts and medical professionals may have been mediated- i.e. communicated via some form of media.

Influences on parenting cited were multiple, complex and intersecting and it is important to consider what we understand to be the role of the media in mediating these influences. This consideration forms a starting point for Couldry and Hepp's *The Mediated Construction of Reality*:

> Since our 'reality' as human beings who must live together is constructed through social processes, what are the consequences for that reality if the social itself is *already* 'mediated'; that is, shaped and formed through media?
>
> Couldry and Hepp, 2017, page 1

Couldry and Hepp's analysis is grounded in Berger and Luckman's *The Social Construction of Reality*. This thesis is grounded in a constructivist ontology, with implicit arguments for the social formation of what Couldry and Hepp call "internal mental reality" (2017, page 3). Hall called for media representations to be considered constituent, not reflective, of reality. I argue that contemporary use of social media could be viewed as a direct example of this, where parents posting and engaging with content about parenting are not simply viewing information about parenting but are participating in actions which form part of their overall parenting practices and beliefs. Couldry and Hepp argue:

> Particularly with the introduction of social media networks from the mid 2000s, 'media' now are much more than specific channels of centralized content: they comprise platforms which, for many humans, literally *are* the spaces where, through communication, they *enact* the social. If the basic building-blocks of social life are potentially themselves now shaped by 'media'- that is, the contents and infrastructure derived from institutionally sustained technologies of

> communication- then social theory must *rethink* the implications of 'media' for its basic term, 'the social'
>
> Couldry and Hepp, 2017, page 2

In relation to considerations of parenting experts, and questions of authority and trust, there should be consideration of how their parenting advice and expertise is mediated. Before the advent of the read/ write internet, the doctrines of parenting experts would have been distributed using media like books, newspapers and television. The content of these media is controlled by publishers, newspaper editors and television executives and production companies. The limited routes to production and distribution through traditional media mean that the parenting expertise championed has come from experts with authority through educational and professional attainment. I argue that because broadcast media must try to produce content to suit diverse audiences, there are efforts for media messages to be authoritative, rather than pluralist. In this situation, it follows naturally that the views of experts, with authority granted from medical, psychological and/ or scientific study, would be promoted above citing the experience of lay, individual sources. Hardyment's exhaustive history of parenting experts was written in 2007. She argued that parenting expertise at that time was characterised by there being no single, dominant voice. She observed a trend emerging in the 1990s of the parent-parenting-expert, beginning with wealthy celebrities who became parents and wrote books about it (the 'yummy mummies'). There then followed a raft of middle-class journalist mothers writing columns about their imperfect parenting, with a comedic twist. Referred to as 'slummy mummies', the humorous, chaotic descriptions of their parenting were considered relatable. Both the yummy and the slummy mummies were lay experts, talking about their own individual experiences of parenting. However, they had 'ins' to media production. In the years since 2007, social media has radically changed the media landscape. There are no gatekeepers to media production via social media. Some mothers in interviews referenced parenting 'influencers'- people who were not previously famous but who documented their parenting experiences via social media, then becoming famous. One mother interviewed (Rebecca) created a new social media account herself to document her experiences as a new mother and make new social contacts. With social media, all users are simultaneously audience and producer. In this situation, it is clearly very easy for a plurality of individual views to be presented.

Paige argued that the presentation of opinion in media validated it:

> Well, everywhere on social media, you know, people will read things and stuff and then they'll start to kind of believe it because it's down on paper sort of thing, or, you know, it's over Facebook or over the news or something
>
> Paige (23; SIMD 1; one baby son (in care of social services); unemployed though volunteers for charity; care leaver)

Paige implied it was others, not herself who would be led to believe something by virtue of it being presented in media. Although mothers cited instances where they had altered their behaviour due to a media message, it was common for mothers both in interviews and online to describe themselves as sceptical, discerning media consumers, who didn't believe everything they read. Mothers suggested that others may be more susceptible to the influence of media messages than they were due to differing ages, education, and experience of specific health issues. They argued that due to experiential and contextual differences, they were more resilient against media influence. However, I suggest, following Couldry and Hepp's arguments, that in an era of "deep mediatisation" (Hepp and Hasebrink, 2017), these contextual and experiential differences are themselves increasingly shaped by the media in its various forms.

[6]

Chapter Six- Perceptions of Impacts to Maternal Wellbeing

6.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses Research Question Three: *What impact do mothers think their parenting identities and behaviours* (Section 6.2) *and the media* (Section 6.3) *have on their wellbeing?*

From the outset of this project the term wellbeing has been used to acknowledge a holistic view of maternal health. I have found the Office of National Statistics' separation of elements of wellbeing in to ten domains helpful in conceptualising wellbeing. The first six domains relate to the wellbeing of individuals and the last four are more to do with wellbeing across a population. The six domains related to individual wellbeing are:

> Personal Wellbeing- Includes individual's feelings of satisfaction with life, whether they feel the things they do in their life are worthwhile and their positive and negative emotions.
>
> Our Relationships- Positive relationships have one of the biggest impacts on our quality of life and happiness. This domain includes satisfaction with personal relationships and feelings of loneliness.
>
> Health- An individual's health is recognised as an important component of their well-being. This domain contains both subjective and objective measures of physical and mental health.
>
> What we do- Includes work and leisure activities and the balance between them.
>
> Where we live- Reflects an individual's dwelling, their local environment and the type of community in which they live. Measures include having a safe, clean and pleasant environment, access to facilities and being part of a cohesive community.
>
> Personal Finance- Includes household income and wealth, its distribution and stability.

In interviews and online forums, mothers referred to perceptions of wellbeing which spanned the full range of the six domains of personal wellbeing identified by the Office of National Statistics. In interviews, participants were not asked about specific domains of wellbeing, nor asked to rate any element of wellbeing on a quantifiable scale. Participants were asked about their perceptions of wellbeing in general terms, with some specific questions, including if they were ever worried about particular issues or circumstances.

There were instances where mothers cited examples of ways in which they thought media representations, and interactions with media, impacted their wellbeing. There were also instances where parenting beliefs and practices were perceived to affect maternal wellbeing. As discussed in the previous chapter, the media was found to be influential to some mothers' parenting beliefs and practices. There is an implication that the media can then be seen to directly impact wellbeing, as well as indirectly impact it, via the influence of parenting behaviours and identities.

6.2 Perceptions of Impacts of Parenting Beliefs, Practices, and Contexts on Maternal Wellbeing

In Furedi's writing on paranoid parenting there is an implicit assumption that parents feel pressurised and that this may negatively affect wellbeing. An influential piece of research for this project relates to the relationship between mothers' parenting beliefs and their wellbeing. Rizzo et al (2013) found that endorsement of certain elements of intensive mothering ideology was associated with reduced maternal wellbeing. Unlike Rizzo et al's study, no scales were used in this project so the relationship between parenting beliefs and wellbeing cannot be quantified. However, in interviews and on online forums, there was discussion of mothers' *perceptions* of how wellbeing may be impacted by a range of different elements of experiences of being a mother.

In this section, discussion of perceptions of impacts to aspects of wellbeing is structured using five of the domains set out by the Office of National Statistics (2019):

6.2.1 "Personal Well-being" (satisfaction, vulnerability, guilt, worry, frustration)

6.2.2 "Our Relationships" (relationships with partner and friends, loneliness, feeling judged or bullied)

6.2.3 "Health" (physical health, mental health, hormones)

6.2.4 “What we do” (employment, autonomy, sleep)

6.2.5 “Personal Finance” (expense)

6.2.1 Personal Wellbeing

The Office of National Statistics (2019) describes this domain as being about an “individual's feelings of satisfaction with life, whether they feel the things they do in their life are worthwhile and their positive and negative emotions”. I argue that life satisfaction in this context is about reaching or exceeding self-set measures of aspirational life course positions. Mothers in interviews and online made several references to how their experiences of motherhood had impacted feelings of satisfaction, and therefore wellbeing. Most of these comments indicated a positive impact on this element of wellbeing.

One poster on an online forum thread about adopting children said that they had wanted to adopt because without a child, they felt incomplete. Several mothers on another thread linked motherhood with identity and said they were proud of being a mother. There were also hints, in some posts, towards notions of biological essentialism in statements about being proud to do what nature had intended their bodies to do.

Julie suggested that the aspiration of mother as an identity, to consolidate identity as a woman, is problematic with regards to the pressure that some people may put themselves under:

> It seems like mums put a load of pressure on themselves to [be] what they expect, and it always seems like an extension of “oh, I must have a child, I need to have a child, I don’t feel like a woman” or, you know [but] … we’ve never really had that particularly
>
> Julie (mid 30s; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; U; police officer)

Rather than seeking an identity of mother, Julie and Catriona’s rationale for wanting to have a child was more to do with the benefit to society of having new generations of children born who were loved. They were fairly ambivalent about the impact to their wellbeing of having a child: “The hard bits are harder than you can possibly imagine, and the good bits are better than you can possibly imagine” (Catriona).

Madhuri talked about having preconceived ideas about “good mother[hood]”. She argued that having a child has given her a sense of meaning, which perhaps she was not expecting:

> Maybe in the childhood or maybe in your college life, you’re okay, “I’ll be the good mother like this. I will do that” It’s not like that. The life is totally changed … and I feel really blessed and I feel, you know? Having a baby in your life, it is

> something which should give you a real meaning of what the real world is, you know?
>
> Madhuri (early 30s; SIMD 5; one baby daughter; U; unemployed though professional background in HR; originally from India)

Stacey said that her life had been enriched by having a child, but that due to her child's additional needs, and because she struggled herself with some social situations, she had felt forced to do things she was uncomfortable doing for the benefit of her child.

> I mean, he's totally enriched my life 'cause he's just amazing. I just love being a mum. But then, kind of, all the problems that he does have and then, like, just the whole thing of having to … put yourself out there with him, you know, and do things that you don't normally do, 'cause you know you can't cope yourself with it, but you have to do it for your child.
>
> Stacey (38; SIMD 3; one mid aged son who has autism; unemployed- left job in payroll due to stress of caring for son)

Iona also talked about struggling in some social situations but argued that having a child had necessitated her participation in group activities which had developed her confidence and enhanced her wellbeing. Stacey argued her difficulty with social situations was due to suspected autism, which between interviews, had been confirmed with a diagnosis of Asperger's, and so direct contrast with Iona's statement is perhaps inappropriate.

> I think, like, even having my kids and stuff …I think that helped me become more confident too, 'cause I was never ever a confident person and always had really bad anxiety, that was even before kids. And since I had them, I'm like, I need to make myself better. I need to improve myself. … I think, I wouldn't have changed without them.
>
> Iona (22; SIMD 2; one baby daughter; one baby son, U)

Though not directly comparable, there is an echoing of sentiment between Stacey and Iona's comments, in Iona's push for self-improvement for the benefit of her children, and Stacey's prioritising her son's enjoyment and wellbeing above her own. In Stacey's reflection "I just love being a mum", there is perhaps a link to satisfaction through fulfilment of an aspirational identity of 'mother', but more directly, there is a suggestion of joy in the activities of parenting. In Iona's first interview, she talked of times before she was a mother, when she had not enjoyed being around children, but that since having a child, she enjoyed the activities of parenting:

> I didn't even like kids, like I was the person if like someone had a baby... I was like ... "oh, it's crying, right, have it back." … The first time I changed a nappy was when she was born … But it's good now, though, I really enjoy it now.

Iona (21; SIMD 2; one baby daughter; currently studying for university degree)

There were several posts on the online forum, which I think to allay the worries others had expressed, implored them to enjoy being a mother. This idea of parenting as an enjoyable, joyful activity is at odds with ethics of paranoid parenting and parental determinism where parenting is pedestalled and therefore considered difficult, pressurised, and arduous. In interviews, there were several references to mothers liking their children ("he's great, ... he's a lovely wee guy" (Alison)), finding them funny ("she's hilarious, like chatting away" (Catriona)), and valuing individual traits ("he's creative, he's funny, he's enthusiastic" (Angela)). Many of these statements came as a counter to expressions of difficulties experienced and negative impacts to wellbeing. Discussions of wellbeing, particularly in interviews, were complex and multifaceted.

There was a suggestion from some, both in interviews and online, that new mothers were vulnerable. Alison argued that because new mothers were vulnerable to mental health issues, they may be particularly harmed by media images deemed judgemental:

> A lot of stuff that seems judgemental or negative could actually be really damaging to mums at a pretty vulnerable time.
>
> […]
>
> I think because obviously women in the year after they give birth are so vulnerable to having mental health issues. ...It's almost a given that if a woman who is feeling a bit low and hasn't had much sleep reads something about how what she's doing might not be the best for her baby, it could, it could really, well on the one hand could ruin her day, on the other hand, could push her into a really negative thought spiral, you know?
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

Gillian suggested that new motherhood is a time when some may feel pressured and that there can be intense social interest in how parents behave.

> People feel a bit vulnerable when they've became a parent as well, like. So, I think certain people could be kind of, felt under pressure by, you know, certain things, or maybe they need to buy a certain thing, or they need to feed their baby a certain way. ... I kind of noticed ... people have got their own ideas of like how you should feed or parent your baby, and you can see that people … have got opinions. It's a strange, it's a strange one, like the eyes have been opened a bit to, you know, the world of being a parent. Like, a lot of mums I don't feel are that supportive of other mums.
>
> Gillian (42; SIMD 6; one baby son; U; works for NHS in social role)

Several mothers in interviews talked about feelings of guilt. These feelings were usually in relation to contravening a central tenant of intensive mothering: child centeredness. Mothers felt guilty when they prioritised some area of life above assumed needs of their child. Aroofa, Annalie and Iona talked about feeling guilty for not spending enough time with their babies, and utilising childcare so that they could work. Lauren and Sarah spoke more generally about feeling guilty for not spending enough focussed time with their children. Alison and Jessica talked about feeling guilty for not exclusively breastfeeding their children, and Iona for having to curtail breastfeeding her son after six months. Shona said she felt guilty about not being able to breastfeed at all. Alison felt guilty for co-sleeping with her child and Sinead felt guilty for not co-sleeping with her child.

Also, mainly in interviews, mothers spoke of feeling worried or fearful. These concerns were largely to do with a potential future harmful effect an imagined or executed action (or inaction) could have on their children. This could be seen then as an endorsement of parental determinism. Fadhila talked about motherhood, for her, essentially being associated with a perpetual state of worry.

> Whether you're responsible for them or not, you will worry about them. If you die, or if they die, one of them, one or the other, … otherwise, you will always be a mother, and it's a job that you can't resign from. And… you know, it's true, because, you know when you're sleeping, you're thinking about your child, you're worrying about your child, you're waking up, and the first thing you think is, 'oh, I'll have to do this, and...'
>
> Fadhila (37; SIMD 5; one baby son, one mid age son, one mid age daughter, U, auditor, from USA and Pakistan)

Iona, Annalie and Amber all talked about feelings of frustration. For Iona this was to do with one of her children seemingly constantly crying but not being able to find the cause. Annalie talked about feeling so frustrated she "wanted to scream" due to difficulties breastfeeding. Amber was infuriated by unwanted parenting advice from older relatives and acquaintances.

6.2.2 Our Relationships

There were several different ways in which mothers spoke about the impact of being a mother on their relationships with others, both in positive and negative terms. Angela argued that parenting can cause tensions in relationships with partners due to different experiences of being parented and therefore different expectations of behaviours. Fadhila spoke about a broad association between motherhood and social isolation, and the potential for severe detriment to maternal wellbeing:

> I don't think anybody feels fulfilled. I think maybe we get moments of fulfilment, but … being a mother is essentially, the main problem is that it is very lonely and isolating. … You will always be lonely and isolated because you are the only person in that position. So how to get past that [is] to form those relationships with other mothers and to be there for another mother, and to kind of have that network, because that's the closest thing to anybody, to someone being like you.
>
> […]
>
> [Presenter of a TED talk] talked about how loneliness is basically like the, you know, like the worst killer … it's like the, the most deadliest disease out there. So she said that mothers are going through this misery, because they're … isolated, they're dealing with children … they don't have adult conversation. And it happens to me, you know, all day, I don't have an adult conversation until my husband comes back home, and by that time I'm too tired and, we just go asleep.
>
> Fadhila (37; SIMD 5; one baby son, one mid age son, one mid age daughter, U, auditor, from USA and Pakistan)

Alison considered maternity leave a lonely time:

> I know that for an awful lot of that first year with David, I wasn't particularly happy, I think I was just lonely, and I was exhausted, and I missed being at work
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

Rebecca, Jessica and Iona explained that becoming a mother had caused a distancing between them and existing social contacts. Rebecca and Jessica used social media to form new social relationships with other mothers, with whom they had more in common than pre-existing friends. Gillian and Shona argued that in some ways, their social network had been enhanced by having children, as they had made "mum friends" at antenatal groups:

> I'm quite enjoying like the sorta social aspect of it … we've got [a] nice group of mum friends, basically, that we've made. So we went to like the NCT ante-natal classes and made friends that way. So it's been really nice, and we do a lot of coffee and cake.
>
> Shona (34; SIMD 9; one baby son; U; scientist)

Shona argued that becoming a mother was a time when more social support was needed. She commented on the helpfulness of support from her family:

> You can feel quite vulnerable and quite like, "oh I don't know if I'm doing the right thing", or if, especially if you don't have support around you. Like I don't know how on earth people do it by themselves. Like if you're a single parent, I couldn't imagine doing it. … We rely a lot on like our families to help us
>
> Shona (34; SIMD 9; one baby son; U; scientist)

In Fadhila's earlier comment about motherhood being socially isolating, she suggested that making similarly situated 'mum friends' may be the most effective solution. However, she explained that she had found the Muslim Pakistani community in Glasgow to be difficult to form social connections in, as she had not grown up in the area.

Alison argued that because new motherhood narrowed her social networks to be largely other new mothers, media representations became influential as the only outside source of information:

> I think it was interesting talking about the sort of different, I guess representations of motherhood in the media and how that can affect the way you feel yourself, I think. Especially when I think in retrospect it's even more so when you're at home with a baby, because the only other people you're seeing are your baby and probably other fairly new mums, and I think there was, yes, a, a lot of stuff that I think what you see on TV, but sometimes also what you hear from other people may be quite a, a sanitised version of, of how life actually is. Because I think for some people it's...I'm not saying that everybody is really competitive, but I think there is a sense that for some folk, they maybe don't want to say that their baby's not a good sleeper or that they're having trouble feeding
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

Alison also suggested the representations of parenting life shown by other new mothers may not be accurate, that they may conceal certain, harder, elements, perhaps to demonstrate capability. Sinead explained that for some issues, she sought advice and support from her aunts, who had children several years ago, rather than newly formed 'mum friends':

> It's not like raw for [my aunts], it's not recent. ... I think that kind of takes away any of the kind of worry about "are they gonna judge me?" ... I do, you know, go to my friends who have kids, but that doesn't feel like as safe a space ... Maybe it's just a middle-class thing, it just feels so high stakes and people have kind of very different views, and some people are quite militant about certain things, and just sometimes people can make comments ... And … maybe that's me projecting but I just feel a bit stressed about it and need to take a step back. But, it just feels a bit intense sometimes. I don't know why. That's a very good question. I guess maybe just because everyone's in the thick of it and you know, they, everyone obviously cares very deeply about their own child, so they want to feel like they're doing the right thing, and if someone wants to do something different, it can kind of provoke anxieties. ... Maybe it's 'cause I actually haven't known those people very long.
>
> Sinead (30s; SIMD 6; one baby son; U (doctorate); paediatric mental health practitioner; from Ireland)

Several mothers online and in interviews spoke about their mothering behaviours and identities and feelings of social scrutiny, being judged and at times bullied. Jade, Amber,

Jessica and Iona, who had become mothers in their late teens or early twenties, all spoke about feeling that they were being judged by others for being young mothers. Sometimes this judgement was in a suggestion that because of their youth, they may not have the knowledge or skills to parent appropriately, but there was also some suggestion of moral failing in having a child at a relatively young age:

> I've had it off old women in the street tutting at me. "Look at that wean with a wean", "she's too young to have a child".
>
> Amber (20; SMID 4; one baby daughter; unemployed)

Other mothers spoke more generally about feeling constantly scrutinised and judged for their parenting behaviours. Stacey and Angela expressed this concisely: "I think you feel judged all the time … everybody's got their own opinions" (Stacey); "I think parenting's hard ... getting it right and wrong, and people's views and judgements on you" (Angela).

When mothers in interviews talked about feeling bullied, this was largely to do with breastfeeding. Mothers spoke about feeling bullied by health professionals and sometimes family members to initiate or maintain breastfeeding. Breastfeeding was considered by Catriona to be a uniquely charged issue:

> I suppose the thing that always comes up, I mean, breastfeeding or bottle feeding or whatever, is just the strong feelings. And how extreme it is that people judging everybody else and how extreme the feelings are about being judged about how you've chosen to feed your baby, where nobody bothers about, "on Saturday night did you give Billy a pizza or chicken nuggets?" Whereas somehow milk is like completely different.
>
> Catriona (mid 30s; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; U; psychologist)

When I questioned Catriona about why she thought breastfeeding might be such a charged issue, she firstly condensed considerations of babies' health to be fundamentally about avoiding death, which required feeding. Further than this though, she argued the concern about how to feed babies has become a particularly intense issue because mothers want to do the best for their children and because mothers are a uniquely scrutinised in their behaviours. I think she may have been about to go on to suggest that this intense scrutiny is not necessarily related to research evidence, which has come more recently, and may not be unequivocal in support of the benefits of breastfeeding. Perhaps quite pertinently to discussions of dogmatic support for breastfeeding, Catriona was at this point cut off by her partner, Julie, citing evidence for wide ranging benefits of breastfeeding.

> Catriona- There's not the evidence either really, you know, that's like a relatively recent thing, the evidence has come in that there's like a one IQ point difference or something between breastfed and bottle fed.
>
> Julie- Yeah, you've also immunity and kind of other benefits, it's not just …
>
> Catriona- Yeah, but in terms of the grand scheme of things, that's maybe very recently that
>
> Julie- And links to asthma …
>
> Catriona- New evidence like that. But again, I've not read the research particularly, whether it would, that would have things to do with other things like poverty or, you know, younger people that wouldn't breastfeed so they can go out, or like that younger person, just because somebody said, oh, formula feed. Is that something to do with the difference as well? These differences that are coming out about immunity and other things.
>
> Catriona (mid 30s; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; U; psychologist)
>
> Julie (mid 30s; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; U; police officer)

One can see in Catriona, and indeed Julie's, arguments that breastfeeding is justified by recourse to scientific evidence but is also tied up in concerns about mothers wanting to do what is "best" for their child, as well as intense social scrutiny grounded in patriarchy and parental determinism. There are links in these comments to Faircloth's research with mothers who engage in extended breastfeeding. "As a form of 'authoritative knowledge' (Jordan, 1997) women utilise 'science' when they talk about their decisions to breastfeed long-term, since it has the effect of placing these non-conventional practices beyond debate (they are simply what is 'healthiest')" (Faircloth, 2010a). Faircloth further argues that these women use 'science' "in the course of their 'identity work'", as mothers practicing attachment parenting (Faircloth, 2010a). Faircloth has also analysed women's justifications of extended breastfeeding, and the relationships to identity work, through a lens of risk consciousness:

> The argument is that the widespread moralisation of infant feeding practices (and parenting more generally) appears to have amplified tensions between various 'tribes' of mothers. In terms of risk consciousness, this leaves the mothers in this sample in a double bind: on the one hand, their marginal position is affirmed through recourse to risk reduction, on the other, their non-conventional practices are left open to the charge of 'riskiness' with respect to the social and emotional development of their children.
>
> Faircloth, 2010b, page 357

Alison argued that breastfeeding was a particularly charged issue: "it's massively emotive because I think there's a sense, there's language around it that is about failure and

successes". Elizabeth argued that although breastfeeding was highly scrutinised, the topic and practice of disciplining children, was also an area of intense social interest:

> I'd say that thinking about the experience of parenting from new-born up to say four, you know, the stage where you're maybe socialising with mums and babies or mums and toddlers, I'd say the disciplining and the feeding are maybe about fifty-fifty … the judgement
>
> Elizabeth (29; SIMD 6; two baby daughters; U; folk musician)

Feeling judged by observers of how they controlled their children's behaviour was mentioned by various mothers (Jade, Angela, Catriona). Lauren argued that such judgement was particularly directed at mothers (rather than fathers), by other women, and that it had a negative effect on her wellbeing:

> I can just think of a recent one … my son [was] crying his pram ... He … was, kind of, like just crying and there's really nothing you can do [except] just let him cry for a bit and he will fall asleep. Three or four women … walked past and go, "oh, that's a shame and stuff" … You hear the comments and you see the looks and I really believe that my husband would not get the same thing. … And it's often women. Often women that I think, "you probably have had children, why are you being so harsh to other mothers?" … On some days you can probably laugh it off and other days you're just made to feel, I'm really bad at this and everybody is judging me. Probably depends like how your mood is that day … but if you're having a terrible, terrible day anyway.
>
> Lauren (36; SIMD 4; one baby son; U; museum professional)

6.2.3 Health

Mothers in interviews spoke about how becoming a mother had impacted their physical health in various ways, largely to do with physical pain. When questioned about the impact to their lives of becoming mothers, Julie and Catriona mentioned various aspects of the wellbeing. Their citing of the physical impacts of motherhood were quite unusual:

> Catriona- That's the other, I mean, nobody tells you how much you're going to literally get punched in the face, like slapped in the face, punched in the face, scratched.
>
> […]
>
> Catriona- That was a lot more when she was really little as well, she was like this baby that isn't even, you know, hardly communicating yet, and she would bop you and so sore on the nose, your eyes were watering…
>
> […]
>
> Julie- … She poked me in the eye on, was it Mum's birthday? … When we went for a dinner, and we were passing her across the table, she was tiny, and her nail went right into my eyeball, just like unexpected pain. That is not something I had previously heard about.

Catriona (mid 30s; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; U; psychologist)

Julie (mid 30s; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; U; police officer)

There were some references to experiences of giving birth, which clearly involved physical pain:

> [The midwife] in the labour suite and stuff, she was absolutely horrendous, like ... "You need to walk round the labour ward" and I was like "no I am so sore, I cannot get up off this bed" "you need to bend over so we can get the epidural in" and I was "this is as far as I can go" and "no, no, you need to go further" and pushing you down. And I want another child, but that puts me off having another one.
>
> Jade (mid 20s; SIMD 1; one mid age son, two stepchildren, one mid age, one teenage; unemployed)

Jade was obviously in considerable pain during this incident, though it seems to me that the element of the experience which most puts her off having another child is the behaviour of the midwife. Other mothers' references to birth experiences vaguely mentioned pain and/or stress, but without suggestion that this had long lasting impacts. There was perhaps a general expectation, from before pregnancy, that childbirth is painful. Alison had originally planned to have a water birth, with minimal pain relief. Due to health conditions, she had a more medically managed birth. She explained being disappointed by this:

> I'd maybe bought into this idea that in, on the one hand it's something that would kind of show your strength a bit, that you were capable of, or, and it sounds awful, but or maybe even deserving of having a baby, you could just do this.
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

This idea of equating strength and pain resilience to mothering capability and worthiness can be linked, in some ways, to discussions of associating good motherhood with sacrifice. Joan Wolf's term 'total motherhood', in reference to breastfeeding, is about efforts to avoid any possible harm to children, at any cost to mothers necessary (Wolf, 2013). Several mothers (Iona, Alison, Rebecca, Fadhila and Sarah) made a passing reference to breastfeeding be associated with physical pain. Sarah cited avoidance of pain as one of the positive impacts to her wellbeing of formula feeding her child:

> [Stopping breastfeeding was] the one thing that I felt bad about, but afterwards, the day that we changed and put her onto bottles I was like, life changed. Like, I could sleep, I wasn't sore, you know, and it was just, it was probably the best thing that we done. But you don't hear of people shouting about that bit of it, you know?
>
> Sarah (30s; SIMD 6; one baby daughter; accountancy related field)

Sarah's comment that her "life changed" when she stopped breastfeeding perhaps indicates the wholesale engagement that was required to breastfeed. There is a sense, in the comment, of freedom when her child was instead being fed with bottles. Iona echoes this sentiment of freedom but for her, stopping breastfeeding was more about bodily autonomy and physical space:

> I can probably relate to the guilt more 'cause the first time, obviously I breastfed [my daughter] for a year. That was fine. I didna want to do more than that because it's almost like your body's not your own, type of thing. I think I struggle with it 'cause, like, obviously I'm young and I, it sounds so stupid, but, I felt like when I was breastfeeding, especially with [first child], I felt like I wasn't fully myself until I stopped because it's, like, your kids are on you all the time, and even before them, I'm very much a person, like, I like my own space.
>
> Iona (21; SIMD 2; one baby daughter, one baby son; U)

This idea of Iona feeling like her body was not her own felt to me linked to some of the references to pregnancy or new mother hormones on online forum threads. There were several instances where hormones were given as an explanation for crying or becoming suddenly upset by things that would not normally be upsetting. I argue there could be an extrapolation from this to suggest that these maternal hormones make some people's emotions not feel like their own. This sentiment was hinted at by Julie: "I think you're just a bit hormonal and letting it run away with you a little bit". It is not easy to designate this separation from one's own emotions as a positive or negative impact to wellbeing. One might generally consider crying and being frequently upset as negative, though perhaps the othering of this emotional response might mean some consider it separate from themselves.

Alison talked about feeling particularly bad about stopping breastfeeding. She seems to equate continued breastfeeding with considerations of good motherhood for herself, but not for other people. The reason she suggests for the disparity between this perception in herself and others is "some magic hormone thing":

> While you wouldn't judge somebody for stopping [breastfeeding] ... you wouldn't judge somebody for not doing it at all. Still for yourself you're like, "I, I need to keep on doing this". And, still, it's like you would judge yourself and be like … "You were not being a good mother because you gave up". But you'd never think that of anybody else. Which is, yes, which is strange, but I think, I think it is weird, I think you get, not brainwashed ... but I think something changes in you. ... God knows why to be honest, some magic hormonal thing.
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

In blaming hormones for perhaps irrational crying, the mothers on the forum seemed to be excusing their reactions. For Alison though, the recourse to hormones seems more negative in terms of her evaluation of herself.

Julie talked about the positive, though perhaps fleeting, impact of hormones immediately after she gave birth:

> Certainly, the first, when she was born and you got all the hormones it's amazing. Like you're just on a high.
>
> Julie (mid 30s; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; U; police officer)

Alison expected to experience a similar rush of hormones just after giving birth, which did not happen:

> I think there is a lot of stuff you hear, like people saying, talking about the kind of big rush of blood and overwhelming love that you feel, and obviously I think it, it grows differently for people. I think that was the one thing, I had kind of expected some big- the minute he was born, like some big paradigm shift ... but it didn't happen. And, I think maybe it does for some people. But, then for lots of people it doesn't. So, I think that, that worried me a lot, just because I was kind of feeling like, well where was that big feeling I was meant to get?
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

It seems to me that Alison was expecting, and wanted, a rush of hormones to take over. She wanted a "big paradigm shift", perhaps directed by hormones.

Mothers' reference to hormones seems to allow a separation between their rational minds (and logical actions), to the often-emotional ways they did react. In Alison's last comment, she wanted to be overcome with emotion, perhaps to have a special moment away from rational thought. Alison went on to talk about apprehension about the impact of new motherhood on her wellbeing. It may be then that she was expecting an overriding, euphoric, hormonal reaction, which didn't come and instead she was left with worry about the future. Alison's comment continues:

> But [these overwhelming feelings of love] certainly ... happen now, but just it takes ... time, you know. … I think every mum to some extent probably feels quite a lot of insecurity and isolation and tiredness in that first year, but I think a big part of it will also be how you think about that. You know … how you handle that, because I think for, for me having the kind of previous history of things, anxiety and low mood it's kind of sometimes it feels like if you get a negative feeling then that is you spiralling into a, a dark place again, when it's not always the case. And, I think because of my history, I was very on the, on the lookout for post-natal depression.
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

Alison commented that because of previous mental ill health, she was alert to the possibility that pregnancy and new motherhood might negatively impact her mental health. Although she referenced long standing issues with anxiety and low mood at various points over both interviews, she did not indicate that motherhood had particularly impacted her mental health. Iona and Paige also referenced existing mental health conditions. For Iona, this was anxiety. In the first interview with Iona, she talked about how motherhood had seemingly had the effect of transferring the focus of her anxiety from social situations to her daughter:

> Tomorrow I'm starting, there's a group to support mothers that have got like just different like mental health issues, like they might have like post-natal depression or blah, blah, blah. For me, it's just anxiety. … I've always had it. But now obviously I've had my daughter, it's kind of shifted to that. So now it's, it'll be hard to sleep, 'cause … I'll get like stupid like scenarios in my head, like, "oh what if we were on the train and the train doors shut on her, and like chopped her hand", or "what if she falls down the stairs" …Whereas before, it was kind of like, "oh, what if I go to uni, and nobody wants to talk to me anymore", or if I said something to offend that person. So now it's just kind of shifted onto my daughter, and it's like, they've always been there, but I think it's just more things get heightened when you have kids.
>
> Iona (21; SIMD 2; one baby daughter; currently studying for university degree)

Iona's comment seems to indicate an exacerbation of her anxiety since becoming a mother. In the follow up interview, she talked about how children having had prompted efforts to increase her confidence and attempt to not allow anxiety to prevent social interactions:

> I was never ever a confident person and always had really bad anxiety, that was even before kids. And since I had them, I'm like, I need to make myself better. I need to improve myself. … Like, I can't be scared of everything all the time. Then they're going to grow up that way too. ... And, like, just to see my wee girl, even though she is, like, a total … pain in the arse, but, like, she's so, like, confident and happy and things and stuff. So that, like, reassures me, like, I'm doing the right thing by her.
>
> Iona (21; SIMD 2; one baby daughter, one baby son; U)

There is an indication of endorsement of parental determinism in Iona's push to become more confident and not fear social situations being motivated by concern of passing on these traits to her children. This motivation clearly leads to some other concerns about her children's wellbeing, which are alleviated by observations that Iona's anxiety does not seem to have been inherited by her daughter.

Paige reported that motherhood had improved a pre-existing mental health condition:

> [Becoming a mother has] actually helped a lot with- I have a borderline personality disorder, so it's kinda, they can't believe it but it's kinda remodified my brain almost, to be more kinda normal, if that makes any sense?
>
> Paige (23; SIMD 1; one baby son (in care of social services); unemployed though volunteers for charity; care leaver)

I assume Paige was referring to mental health clinicians when she said "they can't believe it", which perhaps indicates some formal, continuing assessment of her mental health.

Alison, Iona and Paige were the only mothers in interviews who referred to pre-existing mental health conditions. Some other mothers, online and in interviews (Jessica, Aroofa and Angela) referred to new changes to mental health (all for the worse) which were related to becoming or being a mother. For Jessica, this was trauma related to the birth of her first child.

> That's why I moved hospitals, because I was there with [son] and ... I was diagnosed with PTSD because of my birth with him, and then, like, obviously, that is my automatic hospital to go to, and I was freaking out over it so the second I got in there I was "give me my transfer papers because I'm moving to the other hospital" and they were great, the [other hospital] was absolutely fantastic. I didn't have half as many problems with them.
>
> Jessica (mid 20s; SIMD 1; two mid aged children, unemployed)

One mother on the online forum talked about being traumatised by her child being treated in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and requiring counselling to deal with it. As already mentioned, Aroofa reported a short-term period of low mood in the months immediately post-partum.

Mentions of new mental health conditions were mainly in relation to the period shortly after birth. Angela was unusual in that her mental health seemed to have been impacted later on:

> There were periods I ended up at the doctors and described this low mood, because she didn't want to put down depressed on my notes, because then my children would be at risk. Because obviously I had a disabled child, and that would mean that my caring capacity was less, because I was in a low mood. So that's why she put low mood rather than depression on my notes, because that might have an impact on his care in the future
>
> Angela (39; SIMD 2; two mid aged sons, both with behavioural conditions; U; works for parenting organisation)

The review of literature of research into factors associated with maternal wellbeing found a link between having a child with behavioural conditions and poor maternal wellbeing.

Angela is one of three mothers interviewed who had a child with behavioural conditions. She seemed to associate the difficulties of parenting a child with behavioural conditions with her low mood, and in particular the strain of trying to achieve normality.

6.2.4 What We Do

The "What we do" domain is about "work and leisure activities and the balance between them" (Office of National Statistics, 2019). This subsection covers discussion of employment, feelings of autonomy, and sleep.

Angela explained how state scrutiny of her parenting had led her to seek courses specific to parenting children with behavioural conditions, which in turn led to a change in career:

> I went on the [parenting organisation] course because, at that time, I was feeling as if my parenting was being questioned. …. Just like, "oh are you doing enough, have you tried this course, have you tried that"? And I phoned social work … I went seeking for myself because I didn't want them questioning my parenting. Because it wasn't my parenting, it was my son and how he was coping with what his issues were around him. So, I went proactively and sought them out, and went on the course, and it actually just built me back up again to know that I was being myself, and that I was doing the best job that I could possibly do. So it kinda empowered me a bit, and being more assertive, and what actually my child needed. It taught me a few tools, and from that, and what I was doing, they then offered me a job, to go out and work wi' other parents wi' children wi' additional support needs. So, to go out and give them that support and try and build them back up again

Angela (39; SIMD 2; two mid aged sons, both with behavioural conditions; U; works for parenting organisation)

Angela was dismissive of courses which aimed to teach parenting techniques but very positive about courses designed to support and empower parents. Angela was unusual in changing her job to be one focussed on parenting, though several other mothers discussed how becoming a parent had led to them making changes to their employment in other ways. Most of the mothers interviewed had taken a period of maternity leave away from work. After maternity leave, Alison and Rebecca returned to work part time and Iona worked from home, all in order to allocate time to caring for their children. Madhuri talked about not feeling ready to go back to work after a year, though she had previously expected to:

> She will be turning one by next month, so, but still, I am not confident enough to go to the job. A year, I used to think ... I'll join the job. But now that things have changed, now I'm thinking that she is still too small, I can't be doing the way. Yes, it really bothers me a lot that what's gonna happen to me, to my career, and to my baby, of course, like everything should go smooth. But, yes, in this stage I feel a bit pressure

Madhuri (early 30s; SIMD 5; one baby daughter; U; unemployed though professional background in HR; originally from India)

In mentioning simultaneous concern about her career and her child, there is an indication of tension between them. Caroline, Iona and Fadhila voiced similar concerns. Caroline decided she should prioritise staying at home with her young children, rather than working. Fadhila, a qualified auditor, did not want to pursue some auditing roles because the travel involved would mean less time at home with her children. Between the initial and follow up interviews, Iona had had another child and had finished her university degree. In the follow up interview, she spoke about the tensions between parenting, or more specifically being a mother, and potential career:

> It's just hard 'cause it's, like, trying to balance everything. I think especially when you're a mum, it's like, there's all these expectations, like, you're the one that needs to [be] a parent. But then it's, like, your other things, like, you need to manage as well. I think for a dad it's more like, my partner, he goes to work and it's like, really that's all he has to manage. But, like, for me it was, like, I had to do my uni work plus look after these kids full-time. And even now, like, moving forward in to work it's, like, I still need to balance that
>
> Iona (22; SIMD 2; one baby daughter; one baby son, U)

That the Office of National Statistics includes employment as an element to consider in terms of a person's wellbeing may be indicative of the state equating productivity, and ability to make a contribution to the national economy, with positive wellbeing. I do not make such an equation. I do not think time in paid work should be held in higher esteem than time spent caring for others and therefore do not think a change in time spent in employment towards more spent with children is indicative of a decrease in wellbeing. However, I do think that where mothers would prefer to spend time at work, and/ or developing a career, but feel pushed in to staying with children, or where they feel a conflict between competing pulls for occupation, may indicate reduced wellbeing. This is perhaps more to do with reduced autonomy and agency over one's own time. Of course though, employment brings in money and wealth (and lack thereof) is associated with wellbeing. This will be discussed later in this section.

About perceived societal pressure to work while also managing childcare, Caroline talked specifically about an erosion of autonomy:

> I think that mums are expected particularly to be just absolutely superhuman. You know, "Go and… work a full-time job, then come home and be supernanny mum that can whip up a five-course meal from scratch." ... and absolutely has an effect on people's mental health. Absolutely without a shadow of a doubt. Because you

> can't possibly sustain that amount of achievement, it's just, it's superhuman. Nobody can work full-time and have, you know, cook from scratch, and have perfectly happy children where you're able to spend time with them and have quality time and that's the big thing. I feel that quality time with your children is completely undervalued by society as a whole at the moment. … And, I feel that people's autonomy has been slowly chipped away and that everybody's being forced down a particular path, and I don't know, I just don't think it's right.
>
> Caroline (49; SIMD 1; two mid age daughters, one with autism, one adult daughter, currently unemployed though due to start university soon)

Caroline argued that people were being discouraged from prioritising time with children over work. She argues that this is chipping away people's autonomy, their capacity to choose. However, in arguing that the pressure is towards employment, perhaps her perception of the chipping away of choice is only apparent if a person's desire is to spend time with their children, rather than work and utilise childcare.

Iona stated that she had not planned to have children at the stage of her life that she did.

> My plan before her was I wanted to do English, 'cause I wanted tae be able tae go to other countries and, ... I just thought, well, if I do that, then I could teach in different countries, and I could use that as a way to travel, like around the world. We still do want tae do that, but then obviously we've got [another child on the way so] it might be a bit more like difficult, 'cause then we've got commitments here. … She wasn't planned, so when we found out obviously it was a bit like, oh!
>
> Iona (21; SIMD 2; one baby daughter; currently studying for university degree)

Iona did complete her university degree in English, so fulfilled that element of her career plans. She later spoke about how it may be possible to have a career when her children were older and in school. That Iona has not gone in to teaching English abroad and had children sooner than she planned does not, I argue, necessarily constitute a negative impact to wellbeing. Perhaps there would be a negative impact to wellbeing if this change to plans was resented. As discussed in previous sections, Iona enjoyed various aspects of her experiences of being a parent, so I am inclined to think that Iona does not resent becoming a mother, at least in a wholesale way. However, she did talk about the restrictions of motherhood on autonomy and a sense of freedom and spontaneity, which I think perhaps do indicate an impairment to wellbeing:

> Once she was born, [pre-existing friends] stopped kinda messaging me … And I think they just, like they expect you to be the same way you were before you had kids. But then obviously after you had kids, it's like, well, no, like sometimes you can't make spontaneous plans or, blah, blah, blah.
>
> […]

> I don't think it is something you, kind of, think about until it happens to you. And I think a lot of women struggle with that too. Like, it's almost like they have a new identity because, like, obviously they've got these wee kids that are pure dependent on them. It's not easily; you canna do what you want any more type thing.
>
> Iona (22; SIMD 2; one baby daughter; one baby son, U)

Iona's reference to children being completely dependent indicates a perception that parenting is highly absorbing, and therefore choices to pursue other interests are limited. This was echoed by Catriona and Madhuri:

> You can't just do what you want.
>
> […]
>
> Just the demands on your time that if you want to clear up after, you know, prepare food for her and clean up after her and then do any other kind of household chore, that could be your entire job, because no sooner have you cleaned up breakfast, then it's lunchtime and then it's dinnertime and you're like, "where did time go?"
>
> Catriona (mid 30s; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; U; psychologist)

> I must say there's a lot of changes, like the priority just changes ... nothing … can … stay as the way you were living. So, everything revolves around your baby, like we have to manage the work according to her and according to her mood if she is fine, and if she like, at night we have to like generally I wake up every three hours to feed her. And everything. So, like it's like I am in trance all day and I'm just managing myself. If she's sleeping, I try to sleep with her just to keep myself healthy … And, meanwhile, I just complete my work and stuff. So, like if I have to go for the groceries and something, so it totally depends upon the baby.
>
> Madhuri (early 30s; SIMD 5; one baby daughter; U; unemployed though professional background in HR; originally from India)

Madhuri's reference to being in a trance all day due to lack of sleep and the need to sleep while her baby sleeps to keep herself healthy clearly indicate an acknowledgement of impaired sleep resulting in reduced wellbeing. There were several posts on the online forum asking for advice about infant sleep because they were being kept up and woken up repeatedly by their children and it was impacting various elements of their wellbeing, with one person mentioning it affecting their sanity. Julie outlined some of the impacts to wellbeing lack of sleep was having on them:

> I realised it was the first time in seventeen months that I had woke up by myself in the morning. And it was just like, oh yeah, I remember this. And everyone talks about that and you know about it, but the actual experience of it, it's just you can't describe, that tiredness and not functioning properly and the forgetfulness and the lack of concentration. I can really notice it when I'm driving, how tired I am.
>
> Julie (mid 30s; SIMD 4; one baby daughter; U; police officer)

Rebecca suggested that even though her son was a "good baby", and his sleeping was probably similar to other children of his age, she was still sleep deprived and that being a mother was harder than she thought it would be:

> I probably expected [motherhood] to be a bit easier. ... Like, he's, he is fab to be fair, he's a good baby, but you're kind of constantly sleep deprived. So, he's still not sleeping through the night. I don't think many babies are at his age.
>
> Rebecca (30s; SIMD 5; one baby son; U; hospitality trainer)

There was a sense, in some of the forum posts and as mentioned in passing comments in interviews, that it was expected that having a baby, and becoming a mother, would entail some disturbed and reduced sleep. In the first interview with Alison, she talked about her son having reflux issues which meant he could not tolerate laying on his back. At night, Alison would sit up and support him upright, all night, until 5am when her husband would take over and hold him. She cited lack of sleep and exhaustion as rationale for not wanting to have any more children. At the follow up interview with Alison a year later, her son was still severely disrupting her sleep. By this time, Alison had encountered suggestions from others to essentially be harsher with her son and leave him to cry.

> David's sleep is a big one because he's still not sleeping through the night. So, I'm, I'm pretty shattered. And, a lot of the time ... you will have people saying to you … "why don't you just leave him to cry?" "This is ridiculous, you're just being a martyr". But ... I feel like in terms of his personality you would be on to a loser. And, and also, I wouldn't feel too good about it myself. I think I would, I think it, oh, it's catastrophising, but I think I've struggled quite a lot with sort of anxiety and things myself and I don't, like when I read about things like leaving babies to cry causes cortisol to surge and so on. I just, if there's any risks I can avoid taking for him like...
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

Perhaps with the acknowledgement of scrutiny and criticism from others about how Alison deals with her son's sleep, there is acknowledgement that other babies may have similarly disjointed sleep but that the impact of this on mothers can be mitigated though maternal management. Alison is concerned that by leaving her son to cry, he will have raised cortisol levels, which (as she stated elsewhere) she thinks may lead to anxiety in later life. This rationale is a clear endorsement of parental determinism and total motherhood ideals.

6.2.5 Personal Finance

As previously mentioned, changes to employment (due to having a child), may have an impact on personal finances. There is a wealth of public health research indicating the negative impacts of financial deprivation to health. The statements from mothers in this

project did not really directly link a lack of money with negative impacts to their health. However, there were clear indications that having a child had required considerations of employment and reduced income, as well as extensive expenditure, particularly on childcare and activities. It might be possible to take this as an implication of reduced wellbeing, albeit indirectly.

> I took nine months [maternity leave]. I could have taken a year, but the last three months is unpaid, so we just worked it out sort of financially it would be better to go back after nine months. But I am only working currently two days a week, but I'm hoping to up that. My employer's quite flexible actually, so they're letting me up that as I feel that it's suitable, if you know what I mean, like if it's enough for me to do. … We are in a fortunate position because my Dad is … pretty much retired. So he's doing a Thursday for me, and we decided, well I decided, to go back on a Saturday, which actually isn't my normal working day, but we'd no other, no other option, so Saturday my husband can take him, so. Unfortunately I have to give up one of my week-end days, but, kinda needs must … [My husband] took two weeks [paternity leave], sorry, he took a week. The second week he actually decided to take as a holiday and that's because with his employer, his second, well, with his wage that he earns, the second week for him would have been basically nothing, like, it dwindles right down. So it was more economical for him to take a holiday rather than to take the paternity. So he took one week paternity, but the second week he took as a holiday, just 'cause it made sense. Gave us a bit more money at the end of the day, so.
>
> Rebecca (30s; SIMD 5; one baby son; U; hospitality trainer)

Rebecca and her husband have clearly had to carefully consider how to balance maintaining their income with childcare and time spent with their child. The impact to wellbeing of this balance, and concern over this balance, is not explicit. However, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that it may indicate an impact to wellbeing to some extent.

Annalie talked about limiting some of the group activities she took her daughter due to the expense of them. She indicated though that among other new mothers she was acquainted with, attendance of multiple groups was common.

> [Other parents met at antenatal group] go to a lot of other things like—they take their babies swimming and yoga, everything like that anyway. We're trying to, well, not to spend too much. … Yeah, it's the difficult thing with freelancing. I've been to a baby massage, or a couple of baby massage classes, which was also linked to the NHS. Or they signed me up. And there's another playgroup which is also not for free
>
> Annalie (late 30s/ early 40s; SIMD 5; one baby daughter; classical musician; from South Africa)

Hays' characterisation of an ethic of appropriate motherhood she called 'intensive mothering' included imperatives that parenting should be child focussed, time consuming, labour intensive, expert guided, and financially expensive (Hays, 1996). In response to a question how she wanted to be as a parent, Sarah talked at length about a strong feeling that she should take her infant daughter to a variety of classes, in order that she doesn't "miss out" on anything. Sarah's comment can be seen to clearly situate her parenting practices in ways aligned to intensive mothering.

> Back in January, she was only a couple of months old. I was like, "Right, I really need to start going to classes," 'cause I felt like this is what everybody done, you know, and I'm like, "I don't want her to be missing out," you know? … So, I started looking at them, I was like, "My goodness, there's like so many to choose from." And then, I felt like this was like a huge decision to make sort of thing. … I didn't know it was such a big thing, and then you start thinking, crikey, what, like, "What's the right answer?" You know, "What ones do I pick?" So, we started out doing, well, we were doing yoga class, my cousin's a yoga instructor. So, there was a mum and baby yoga class… So, we done that, and [class name] which is baby sign language classes. … We stopped that and that's when I started 'Bounce and Rhyme' so we've been to that maybe the last month or two. So, fairly new to that, and then [a sensory activity session for babies] in [area name], which is quite good, I'm quite liking that. But again, that's on the summer holiday just now. But, it's quite good, 'cause I feel it's things that you can't really recreate at home. … It is like more expensive compared to some others, and oh, there was a girl that came last week, it was her first week, and I felt for her, she was like, her wee baby was just six weeks old and I was like, "Amazing, like, good on you, getting out." But, she was like harassed and she was late, and she couldn't open the door, so we're all helping her and then, she was saying, "Oh, I really liked it, but I don't know if I can come back next week because it's so—I need to pay full-price next week and it's eight pounds." … [there is a taster session for] … four pounds, and then the next one was eight, and I was like, "Oh, bless"' Like, … it adds up, but I just think, "If [my daughter] enjoys it, like I'm lucky that I don't have to consider that factor."
>
> Sarah (30s; SIMD 6; one baby daughter; accountancy related field)

There is an implicit suggestion in Sarah's comment that she thinks most mothers might be similarly concerned with taking their child to a variety of, often expensive, groups, and therefore an implicit expectation of widespread endorsement of intensive mothering ideals. Sarah acknowledges that attending numerous groups is financially expensive and empathises with another mother she encountered for who the cost was a prohibitory factor. Decisions about parenting practices, as we have seen throughout these chapters, are multifaceted and balance various factors. In Sarah's last sentence "If [my daughter] enjoys it, like I'm lucky that I don't have to consider [financial expense as a] factor", one can see some of this balance of factors. Financial expense is preferable to not participating in child centred activities. This financial outlay is clearly a cost not all mothers can afford.

6.3 Perceptions of Media Impact on Maternal Wellbeing

The scoping review of research into social factors affecting maternal wellbeing did not reveal any research suggesting a link between media representations and mothers' wellbeing. However, it did identify research linking maternal practices and beliefs and reduced wellbeing. There is suggestion, as will be detailed in this section, that the impact of media representations on maternal wellbeing are intertwined with considerations of maternal identities and behaviours.

6.3.1 Link Between Maternal Identities and the Impact to Wellbeing of Media Representations

One of the most common emotional responses to media representations, cited by mothers both online and in interviews, was distress. This distress seemingly arose because the media image was felt to have a resonance with individual experience. In online forum discussion, mothers talked of being upset by an advert for a pregnancy test (because they were currently experiencing a miscarriage), by comments on the forum which were critical of the ethics of assisted fertility treatments (because the respondent was currently trying to conceive) and by an advert for nappies for premature babies (because various respondents had experienced their child being in neonatal intensive care and one had experienced bereavement). There was also reference in several different threads to finding media reporting of deliberate harm to children particularly distressing because they have children themselves. One poster made a comment to the effect that she considered reality to be constructed separately by individuals and that if individuals are inundated with unpleasant things (via the media), then this would result in unpleasant realities for people.

In interviews, this link between finding particular media images distressing and personal experience was not as prominent, with Lauren and Alison being notable exceptions:

> I read a story about a lady, who, it was through an accident her son had died and I think that probably made me think that week … about all the, like, little things that you, you know, you could mistakenly do and end up in tragedy. … In the media and when I'm reading it, it would maybe make me quite upset, you know, or like have a cry or, you know, there can be things I guess if you're reading about somebody losing a child and I think it would, you know, sometimes I've had like a very immediate emotional reaction. I guess … it's probably … made me anxious for a little while
>
> Lauren (36; SIMD 4; one baby son; U; museum professional)

> I think occasionally, I've read something… I think if I'm feeling particularly vulnerable, you know, if I'm really, maybe not having a good day, or if I've had very little sleep, then something that I see about how co-sleeping, for example, is a dreadful thing to do, and you are effectively going to kill your baby if you do it.

> Would make me feel terrible, you know? Really, really awful, and could, that could linger, that could really lower my mood for a few days, you know? And… I could start going over that again and again in my head and it could just build and build and build and get worse until you feel like absolute rubbish, you know? But, it does depend what kind of a day you're having.
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

The distress Lauren describes after reading about an accident where a child was killed could be seen to be related to her having a child herself and thinking about all the possible ways harm could come to her child that she would have to protect him from. There is a sense that this hypervigilance is an unpleasant, anxious way of thinking. As well as this though, when she mentions that her immediate emotional reaction would be to cry, there is a hint of similarities to comments on the online forums where the experience of motherhood seems to allow for empathetic distress when exposed to media messages about harm to children. In Alison's case, she talks of vulnerability, caused by lack of sleep or stressful circumstances or perhaps pre-existing mental health conditions, which becomes a factor in being upset or worried by reading about potential harms related to co-sleeping. Alison argues that this vulnerability is what may cause her to be upset for a number of days, and affect her general mood, but it is because it is related to co-sleeping (which she does with her son) that this distress is triggered. She further explains:

> If I was looking at a forum like Mumsnet for example, … and you see that a thread's come up about co-sleeping, then I think a lot of the time I would choose not to look at it. Because I know that somebody is gonna come on and post some statistics about cot death and co-sleeping, and it's gonna make me feel pretty desperate and sad because I can't, at the moment, get my baby not to co-sleep, it's the only way he will sleep. So, I would, if I'm feeling like that is going to make me feel terrible then I'm not gonna look at it.
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

It seems Alison's choice to co-sleep is for pragmatic, rather than ideological reasons, and perhaps comes as last resort after many sleepless nights. That the choice was based on a pragmatic rationale implies an evaluation of benefit and risk, where Alison acknowledges the risks which may be referred to in the media but has made a choice where she perhaps could see no other options available. These risks are not denied by Alison but essentially became something she does not want to be reminded of.

I understand some of other Alison's other comments to be about the relationship between media images and self-worth. In response to a question about whether she thought media

representations of parenting have had a negative or positive impression on her, she reflected:

> I think a while back I would've said negative. Because it would just seem like everyone is doing better than you, you know? And, with social media, everyone's got something to say about why another mother's doing a rubbish job. You know, or why they wouldn't do it like that. But, I think more recently, there's been a movement a lot more towards positivity, and towards support. There's another site, it's an American one called 'Scary Mommy' which I like as well … it's very kind of pushing non-judgement and support for other mothers, and I think that there's been more of a shift in focus onto not just babies, but mothers as well, you know, and how … a lot of stuff that seems judgemental or negative could actually be really damaging to mums at a pretty vulnerable time. So, I think that—I think these days, sort of what you see in the media, if it's geared towards kind of supporting and lifting mothers up a bit, you know, that can be really, really positive, and sometimes that might just be what somebody needs to see to feel a wee bit better about themselves.
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

Self-worth is an evaluation of oneself, one's behaviours and identities, and is influenced by perceptions of other people, and considerations of how other people might perceive one's own behaviours and identities. Alison talked about media messages she perceived as "everyone doing better than you" having a negative impression on the way she felt and more supportive, non-judgemental media messages having a positive effect on her.

Several mothers (Angela, Alison, Gillian, Iona, Lauren, Annalie, Rebecca and Sarah) referred to media, particularly social media, representations of perfectionist parenting, which some felt had a competitive element to it. Angela labelled these representations of motherhood "Stepford Wife" and argued that everyone feels pressure from the media to be a "perfect parent". Iona did not use terms like inadequate or make direct reference to self-worth, but my interpretation of her statements is that perfectionist media representations have a negative impact on her wellbeing in ways related to self-worth.

> You're just looking at all these things [on social media], like 'oh, a perfect family,' or whatever and … maybe … you've not got a partner. Like for me … when my wee girl was born and it was always just things like, … baby's just born, and they're already at groups and things, and they're like, "oh, perfect day for like a baby tea party or whatever," And I would be like … it's hard for me to leave the house today. … Or even statuses, like, "well, it's only nine o'clock in the morning, and we've already been shopping, made dinner, and done this and done that, and now we're off for a gentle stroll in the park," … And you're like, you'll just be sitting there and it's like nearly afternoon, and you're just; 'cause it is hard. …For me, it was the worst when I was at uni, 'cause I never had time for anything. And … all these other mums, they were going out taking their kids to groups every day, and … she was at nursery, and I used to say, "I feel really bad … I'm not even

> giving time to her, I don't have time," … even on my day off, I was trying tae type up essays and ... she would be crying 'cause she was getting annoyed, and it was really, really difficult. And then obviously it makes it more difficult when you see people that's like out doing things and stuff like that. And you're like, you're struggling…
>
> Iona (21; SIMD 2; one baby daughter; currently studying for university degree)

As well as what I perceive as impacts to self-esteem, Iona also talks about concern about not giving her daughter enough time and attention. This is perhaps a hint at the impacts to maternal wellbeing of parenting beliefs. Rebecca argued that rather than having an impact on self-esteem, perfectionist representations of parenting on social media made her feel envious:

> I suppose … sometimes you look at, like, Instagram, and you look at these mums like doing, going on fancy holidays and things, and it maybe makes you a wee bit envious. Thinking "oh, they're doing this with their kids, and they're going to Florida on these big family holidays". And not everyone can afford that, so, maybe in a way it makes you feel a bit, like, not guilty, but, like, I suppose just a bit envious. Think "God they're getting to do all these fun things with their kids", but I know that's not everything in life, is going on fancy holidays and everything. So yeah, maybe in a way you feel a bit influenced by other people's social media accounts.
>
> Rebecca (early 30s; SIMD 5; one baby son; U; hospitality trainer)

She seems to argue that this does not make her feel guilty because "I know that's not everything in life". Iona also had arguments to mitigate the impact of these media representations on her: "You need to remember, like, a lot of social media is just for show. Like, things aren't like that in real life". However, I found Iona, out of the mothers interviewed, to seem particularly affected by perfectionist, competitive media representations in terms of her wellbeing. There were some posts on the online forum expressing similar sentiments about the negative impact to their wellbeing of media representations of perfect seeming lives. Sinead, who at another point in the interview said she was inevitably impacted by media representations of parenting, was critical of representations of competitive parenting and argued for a root cause of these types of representations:

> Well this whole 'Mommy Wars' thing … it's … bullshit about how women are naturally catty and women naturally supposedly are always competitive and like, yeah, I think the media fuel it in a lot of ways, but they depict it as an essential problem with women and an essential problem with female, like nature, whereas it's patriarchy

Sinead (30s; SIMD 6; one baby son; U (doctorate); paediatric mental health practitioner; from Ireland)

It is possible that Sinead's analysis of the socio-political power structures related to some media messages act as a protective factor for impacts to her wellbeing. This is important to consider, I think, in terms of her comments cited earlier where she argued a common facet of Irish media was to represent motherhood as the primary identity of a woman, and that having more children positioned mothers in higher media esteem.

Paige, a mother with no partner, implied impact to her wellbeing of media messages about 'single mums':

> Sometimes I'll see wee stupid things, like, you know, how single mums get penalised and stuff like that, you know? … It's just a case o', like, you know, "they can't bring up their kids right, they're on their own" ... and… I don't know, it's kinda hard.

Paige (23; SIMD 1; one baby son (in care of social services); unemployed though volunteers for charity; care leaver)

With further questioning, Paige did not really elaborate on the ways in which she might be impacted by these media messages, but spoke more generally about the impact on mothers without partners:

> I think it's more to do with the judgement of other people. … The news can bring out this huge story about it, people will start worrying, you know, since they haven't got, like husbands or whatever and then it just, it brings, kinda, their nervousness … everywhere they go, they're constantly watching, they're constantly thinking they're being judged

Paige (23; SIMD 1; one baby son (in care of social services); unemployed though volunteers for charity; care leaver)

Paige seems to argue that impacts on wellbeing do not come directly from media messages but rather from perceptions of judgements from other people, which may in turn be influenced by media messages. This could be seen to be aligned with Milkie's (1999, pages 203 and 205) notion of 'reflected appraisals' (discussed in the literature review chapter (Section 2.4.3)). Milkie argued that some participants in her research were concerned about media representations they personally viewed as unrealistic due to perception that others may use these representations in evaluations of them. Paige was making a similar kind of point: though she conceded that as a single mother, seeing media messages denigrating single mothers was "hard", her central concern was that single mothers feel judged by others who use these media messages in evaluations of them.

Angela talked about the relationship between public perception and media images, arguing, in a way, that media messages could be used as a proxy for general, public opinion. Further than this, she argued that people who do not conform to social norms, as described in the media, would feel pressure, and be negatively impacted.

> Being surrounded by people who are saying their lives are perfect and they're not struggling wi' this, that and the next thing, has a major impact. You get parents on TV, like Holly Willoughby, who looks amazing, and she comes across as this amazing mum, she's keeping a full-time job, she's doing all this. It's like, that's where you should be striving, you can still work, you can still do this. But it's totally different when you've got a child that's different. ...It's just that pressure that you have to, to conform to what society believe is what you should be. And I think it does put a lot o' pressure on parents, and especially parents with children with additional support needs.
>
> Angela (39; SIMD 2; two mid aged sons, both with behavioural conditions; U; works for parenting organisation)

6.3.2 Positive Impacts on Wellbeing

As well as negative impacts to wellbeing, several mothers in interviews and on online forums commented on the positive impact of the media to their wellbeing. Descriptions of positive impacts were generally in relation to social media. The type of impact could largely be split in to four types: 'heart-warming'; exposure to information that improved wellbeing; reassurance; and developing or enhancing social relationships.

On online forums, in discussion of various television adverts which featured children growing up, or being adopted, there were several posts which described enjoyment of these plots. These were often talked about using terms like heart-warming and linked to their own experiences of being a mother and seeing their children grow up. They seemed to enjoy these depictions, perhaps because they reflected, and therefore enhanced, feelings of sentimentality about childrearing.

There has already been discussion of mothers using the media as a source of information to guide parenting behaviour. Aroofa was quite unusual in that she asserted that due selection of media producers and education, she was not susceptible to misleading media representations of parenting and therefore, that the media only had positive and no negative effects on her:

> I think that ... the people I'm connected with on social media, I think that they all are passing on a really positive message related to parenting. There is always a very good thing to learn. I think the people are so much clever or at least like a person, like an educated person like me I can, I can clearly differentiate between what is good parenting or what is bad parenting. … So yeah, I think so that … a positive impact and I'm not seeing any negative element related to the media.

Aroofa (26; SIMD 1; one baby son; U; current PhD student; from Pakistan)

It seems pertinent that she said "There is always a very good thing to learn" in relation to other comments she made about the positive impact of the media. She provided perhaps the only explicit example of the media improving maternal wellbeing through being a source of information when she recalled some of her mental health experiences:

> When I was passing through a phase of depression when he was born and I was not able to accept it for a couple of months, then the media, social media has a very, has a very big impact on my life because I came across two videos you know, or which tried to convince me that this phase shall pass
>
> Aroofa (26; SIMD 1; one baby son; U; current PhD student; from Pakistan)

The videos Aroofa watched seemed to have provided her with information that the depression she was experiencing would be temporary, which made her feel better. It is unclear from the interview whether Aroofa experienced short term low mood which was self-resolved (often called the "baby blues") or longer term post-natal depression which often requires treatment (NHS, 2018). If Aroofa was experiencing post-natal depression and the videos gave her the impression that this condition would resolve without any treatment, then the videos may have not only been misleading (NHS, 2018), but also been harmful in that they may have discouraged her from seeking treatment. However, there is an implicit suggestion that the media message was helpful and positive for her wellbeing.

There were several examples of comments indicating a positive impact on wellbeing from the media related to reassurance. Alison talked of social media posts which encouraged acceptance of pluralist parenting practices. She seemed to have found these sentiments reassuring in alleviating concerns that particular practices may be wrong and harmful to children.

> You get some lovely things … posts that people will share on Facebook saying, "No matter how you feed your baby, no matter how your baby sleeps, you're doing a great job." And, there was a great one that I read ... and it kind of covered all these bases that, no matter what … you're doing, you're probably doing a pretty good job, and things like that make me feel good, you know, and that Facebook group … that's really, really nice because no matter what, if you go on and you post about, "Oh, this has happened today" Somebody's always gonna come on and be like, "It's not a big deal," you know? … There was one occasion … I posted something along those lines like, "Like, has anybody else had an experience like this?" And, so many people came on and said, "Yes, this is not unusual, and just you keep on… Just keep doing what you're doing for your baby"
>
> Alison (32; SIMD 10; one baby son; U; university administrator)

Alison also seemed to be reassured by responses to posts on a Facebook group where other mothers said that they had similar experiences. However, I would argue that this reassurance is via a different mechanism than that to do with acceptance of pluralist parenting practices. This type of reassurance comes from knowledge that others have had similar experiences and that it did not lead to dire consequences for them. Reassurance from shared experience was mentioned by several mothers (Paige, Madhuri, Shona, Sinead). Sinead's comments seem more about others not internalising and worrying about similar experiences:

> [Realistic media depictions of parenting have] made me not doubt myself so much. Like I just kind of see how sometimes other people have a lot more confidence, in their decisions, and who don't over think them as much.
>
> Sinead (30s; SIMD 6; one baby son; U (doctorate); paediatric mental health practitioner; from Ireland)

Angela argued that having a child with a disability negatively impacted maternal mental health but that social media groups for these parents meant that common experiences could be shared, and a different perception of normality established, which mitigated some of these negative impacts:

> I would say that most parents with children that are, any disability, kind of got a post-traumatic stress, because you're always looking for the next thing to go wrong. … You're always highly stressed you're always living on your nerves. ... Like, when you go out for the day, have you got X, Y and Z with you 'cause if you don't then this might happen, that might happen. You're always thinking like that, and I think we do have low moods, and I think we are kinda isolated at times, and depressed. And I think that's why quite a lot of these online forums have come onboard, like [group name], for parents to have that conversation wi' one another, to realise that it's normal.
>
> Angela (39; SIMD 2; two mid aged sons, both with behavioural conditions; U; works for parenting organisation)

In Angela's comment, there can be seen an example of social media facilitating social connections between people who may well have not otherwise had face to face interactions. Social media was also used by Alison, Jessica, Amber, Gillian, Rebecca and Shona to form new social connections with other parents. Rebecca explained how as her more traditional social support opportunities were inaccessible, she used social media to find alternative social connections:

> I looked up like different hash tags, so like 'parenthood' or 'mothering' or 'Glasgow mum' for example. And then, it was kind of like I followed certain mums and then they would follow me, or they would follow me and I would follow them back. … And then, sort of looked at where they were maybe from as well,

> and just, if I could relate ... like, similar age, so obviously we could, potentially there's a chance we could meet up or have like-minded things in common. I think it's been really good having the Instagram page actually, because a lot of my friends live down in [home town] and … the rest of my friends that live in Glasgow, they're not mums, so they're working full-time, so, it was nice to be able to find people. … I think the Instagram was really good at being able to go for coffee with somebody
>
> Rebecca (early 30s; SIMD 5; one baby son; U; hospitality)

Madhuri, who originally comes from India, but has also lived in Singapore, talked about how social media enabled her to maintain contact with people she already had relationships with. Through social media she is able to seek advice and support from these people and also keep up to date with their lives, which in turn she finds informative in relation to her parenting:

> So we have a group, whenever I feel that something is getting wrong, I just give a buzz, and I get a lot of, lot of, lot of help. So, they are really great ladies, so they help me a lot. … [And] they post the pictures, so like … if someone's crawling, someone is walking, someone is talking, someone is doing all the naughty something. So, they all, that I keep on sharing the things, so which gives a really good, good, idea like what's your baby gonna be at the next in that case.
>
> Madhuri (early 30s; SIMD 5; one baby daughter; U; unemployed though professional background in HR; originally from India)

All the mothers interviewed used social media and all except Angela and Rebecca used Facebook. Facebook can be used to communicate with existing social connections, and through groups, make new ones. It is likely that most of the mothers interviewed communicated, via Facebook with existing social ties. It is perhaps surprising then that there was a scarcity of discussion about this as a specific avenue of social support. Madhuri was noticeable in her discussion of online support from existing social connections. This is perhaps because Madhuri did not seem to have many social connections with people located locally. For several mothers, Facebook parenting groups, consisting largely of people not previously known, seemed an important source of advice and support. Shona found information and support from a closed Whatsapp group consisting of mothers she met at an in person antenatal group. She contrasted this group with interactions she suggests might be likely on other social media platforms:

> The WhatsApp group [is] a bit more real. I think that's where there the photos of crying babies, and there are photos of people having a meltdown and, you know, bad days. … Because it's a closed group, that's where you've got your support. Rather than just having like someone who you worked with five years ago comment, 'oh, are you okay?' ... which isn't really helpful, I don't think.

Shona (34; SIMD 9; one baby son; U; scientist)

Shona's comment implies that the privacy of the group means that more "real" things can be shared. However, relevance of new, parenting specific, social contacts are also important:

> That was like one of the reasons for doing like the NCT class, ... 'cause you're basically paying for friends, but … it's been really good, because you've got them from like before the birth. Whereas like most of my friends have either, don't have babies, or their babies are a bit older. ... So then like if I didn't have that, I wouldn't have people to hang out with during the day. I wouldn't have people who can reply to messages in the middle of the night 'cause they're up.
>
> Shona (34; SIMD 9; one baby son; U; scientist)

These new social contacts were important to Shona, partly because conversation could be carried out in a closed group and also because the social contacts were with other mothers of children of similar age, and who were of a similar social class, with similar opportunities for maternity leave.

In research with perinatal women on their mental health and digital relationships during the COVID-19 lockdown, Das found an association between the online support received and existing relationships:

> Those best connected to supportive interpersonal and familial relationships offline, seemed to benefit the most from informal connections online to friends and family, meaning that technology offered up social potentials most usefully when there were pre-existing strong and supportive relationships in the first place.
>
> Das, 2020a, page 4

At first glance, this seems at odds with the experiences of mothers I interviewed. The mothers I spoke to who seemed to find the most support in online spaces, tended to not have convenient, trusted and specific support and information available from existing offline social contacts. Das' findings though came at a very specific time (the start of the first coronavirus lockdown in the UK), when it was not possible to make "mum friends" offline at all. Rather than Das' findings presenting a contradiction to mine, I argue that the variance in fact highlights the difference in timing of the research. If I had conducted the interviews during lockdown, I think it likely more mothers would have talked about digital interactions with, and support from, pre-existing offline connections.

6.4 Analysis

In the first part of the chapter, I presented data from interviews and online forums where mothers discussed perceptions of how their parenting beliefs, practices and contexts impacted their wellbeing. Becoming a mother was talked about by mothers online in terms of improving life satisfaction and therefore wellbeing. Mothers in interviews presented more nuanced considerations of motherhood and life satisfaction. There were arguments online that motherhood was joyful, and various mothers in interviews spoke about liking their children, with the implication that the positive attributes of their children offset some of the negative aspects of being a mother. There was a suggestion that new motherhood was a time of vulnerability to negative impacts to wellbeing. Mothers in interviews referenced feelings of guilt, usually to do with some aspect of their parenting behaviours not being child centred (a tenant of intensive mothering). Various mothers in interviews talked about feelings of worry to do with fear of harm coming to their child, usually related to an action or inaction on their part. This could therefore be related to endorsement of parental determinism having a negative impact on wellbeing. In terms of social relationships, there were comments about parenting causing tensions in relationships with partners and distancing from some previous friendships. There was discussion of the association, for some mothers, between new motherhood and loneliness. For some mothers though, motherhood brought with it opportunities for making new friends and social contacts. There were mentions of feeling under intense social scrutiny, particularly around issues of breastfeeding and discipline. Motherhood was associated with physical pain for some mothers, due to accidental injury, childbirth and breastfeeding. One interviewed mother seemed to experience an exacerbation of pre-existing anxiety when she became a mother and two mothers talked about new periods of low mood or depression. One interviewed mother argued that a pre-existing mental health condition had improved since becoming a mother. Hormones associated with pregnancy, birth or new motherhood were offered by some mothers as an explanation for reacting in ways they might consider otherwise irrational. One mother, Alison, she suggested hormones may explain why her feelings of the importance of breastfeeding her son were heightened. Several mothers interviewed had altered their employment arrangements, either temporarily or permanently, due to becoming mothers. There was discussion of motherhood reducing feelings of autonomy. There was broad acknowledgement that living with young children caused disrupted sleep and some surprise expressed (by Julie) at the impact to wellbeing such disrupted sleep had. There was perhaps implicit endorsement of an aspect of intensive mothering- that appropriate childrearing is financially expensive. For some mothers

interviewed, this financial outlay was something that required careful planning, and consideration.

Mothers in interviews spoke at length about the impacts of becoming a mother to their wellbeing. Although there were positive impacts to wellbeing, the balance did seem to tip towards the negative in terms of the aspects cited by mothers. In this regard, I am reminded of a question from an audience member following presentations of research to do with intensive mothering and parental determinism. The question was something along the lines of "if motherhood is so stressful, why do people do it?". The reasons people might choose to become a mother are obviously myriad, intersecting, and not the subject of this project. However, some hints at rationales can be seen in the data, particularly around life satisfaction. On the online forums there was mention of wanting to become a parent to feel complete. Less overt than this, in discussion of satisfaction being a process of continuing evaluation of one's life and status, there is possibly a suggestion that having children is an element of socially promoted ideas of a successful, worthwhile life. These hints are made explicit in other projects focussed differently, for example in the essay anthology *Selfish, Shallow and Self Absorbed*, where the writers, all of whom have chosen not to have children, "give unique perspectives on the overwhelming cultural pressure of parenthood" and argue that "parenthood is not the only path to a happy, productive life" (Editors of Daum, 2015, back cover). When wellbeing is considered truly holistically and as a complexly intersecting, dynamically shifting concept, then a person's evaluation of their own wellbeing may well be peppered with balance and consideration of pay off. When mothers in interviews talked about some of the joyful aspects of being a mother, and the different ways in which they liked and valued their children, this was often as part of a comment where they had talked about negative aspects of motherhood. The focus of Donath's (2015) research was mothers who had had such holistic self-evaluations and concluded that they would have been better off not becoming mothers. This conclusion, argues Donath, is widely held as socially unacceptable:

> We already know that motherhood can be a meaningful relationship for women that instils feelings of fulfilment, joy, love, comfort, pride and satisfaction. We already know at the same time motherhood can be saturated with tensions and ambivalence that might create helplessness, frustration, guilt, shame, anger, hostility, and disappointment. We already know that motherhood might reduce the range of women's movement and degree of independence.
>
> […]

> Whether or not mothers face and acknowledge difficulties, they are not expected nor allowed to feel and think that the transition to motherhood was an unfortunate move.
>
> Without a language to speak about it, and in light of this locating of motherhood beyond the human experience of regret, regretting becoming a mother is hardly ever mentioned
>
> Donath, 2015, pages xiv and xv

In the second section of the chapter, I cited several examples of ways in which mothers perceived the media to have direct impacts on their wellbeing, for better and worse. I suggested that media representations of perfectionist or competitive parenting may impact on mother's wellbeing through considerations of self-worth. There was suggestion that media images may indicate wider social opinion and so some mothers reported feeling judgement or pressure related to their parenting experiences or practices. Media representations of family life was described by some mothers online as 'heart-warming'. Social media was perceived as sometimes having a positive impact on maternal wellbeing through providing exposure to information that improved wellbeing; reassurance; and developing or enhancing social relationships. I suggested that there may be indirect links between media representations and wellbeing in that the media may influence particular parenting practices and beliefs which in turn impact maternal wellbeing. Though there were many instances cited where various parenting behaviours, beliefs and being a new mother generally, impacted wellbeing, the link between these identities/ practices and media representations was not made explicit. As seen in the previous chapter, there were instances where mothers noticed media representations promoting or being broadly related to parental determinism. There were also some instances where mothers reported being influenced in their parenting practices, and perhaps beliefs, by media representations. What was missing though was a link made by any mother between a media representation, a parenting belief or practice, and wellbeing. The indirect link I hypothesised was not mentioned by any mother. I would argue though, that this doesn't that it does not exist. The interrelatedness of parenting identities, beliefs and wellbeing were very well articulated by mothers. Though the mothers, and most other people, are enmeshed, to greater or lesser extents in a matrix of mediated communication, the links between this mediation and identities, practices and wellbeing are seemingly very difficult to pin down.

[7]

Chapter Seven- Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter is structured as follows: first I summarise the key findings for each research question. I then propose and critique links between findings. Following this, I suggest implications for policy, practice, and further research, suggesting some exemplar issues. I next discuss important ways in which the findings of the project might be reinterpreted in light of COVID-19 and possible shifts in focus of the project were it to be conducted after/ during the pandemic. Finally, I outline how this research has contributed to the literature on parenting culture studies, perceived maternal wellbeing and media influence.

7.2 Responding to the Research Questions

A set of research questions were formulated at the start of the project, after a process of literature searching and critique, but before data collection had begun (see Section 2.5.3 for list). These research questions were a way of picking apart different aspects of the aim of the project, which was to *examine maternal understandings of 'parental determinism', the role of the media in shaping these understandings, and how mothers perceive these understandings to impact their wellbeing*. During data analysis, I came to realise that an important aspect of the research aim had not been addressed by an initial research question. I therefore added the question *What are mothers' understandings of parental determinism and to what extent do they endorse a causal association between their actions and their children's outcomes?* Although this was omitted from the original list of research questions, it was implicit in my data collection, and the interview topic guides addressed it.

Following feedback from thesis examiners, the research questions were streamlined to three questions, which are presented in the next subsections, with a summary of finding relating to each one.

7.2.1 Research Question One: What Are Mothers' Understandings of Parental Determinism and to What Extent do They Endorse a Causal Association Between Their Actions and Their Children's Outcomes?

There was no outright rejection of a causal association between parental action and children's outcomes. However, some mothers presented nuanced endorsement, citing other factors that may influence how their children turn out.

I presented mothers' discussions of various aspects of parental determinism and a range of endorsement of its causality in Chapter Four. I grouped seven mothers as weakly endorsing causality, three of whom had older children with conditions affecting their behaviour. It may be that the older age of their children had allowed more opportunity for observation and reflection. It may also be that the children, due to their conditions, did not react to parenting behaviours in ways that had been expected, and indeed some planned parenting behaviours appeared ineffectual. These factors combined may have highlighted different influential factors on their children's outcomes.

Of the eight mothers I grouped as strongly endorsing the causality of parental determinism, four presented accounts of poor parenting they had experienced as children. There were arguments that the parenting they experienced was related to issues they later encountered, particularly around mental health. These were at times presented almost as a cautionary tale and as exemplars of behaviours they wanted to avoid as parents themselves.

7.2.2 Research Question Two: What do Mothers Think are the Key Sources of Their Beliefs and Attitudes on Parenting and What Impact do Mothers Think Broadcast and Social Media Representations of Parenting Have on Their Parenting Identities and Behaviours?

This question, including two intermediary questions (2a and 2b) were the focus of Chapter Five. Mothers in interviews and on online forums discussed a range of influences on their parenting ideals and behaviours, which spanned across the paradigms of expert-guided and tacit knowledge. These different sources included childhood experiences, instinct, family members, friends, social norms, partners, 'hearing stories', religion, politics, education, employment, medical authority, scientific research, 'psy' expertise, parent training, expert parents, the media, online channels, and celebrity parents. I argued that it may not always be possible to discern a clear distinction between lay and professional advice, where for example, lay sources appear to be influenced by psychological theories.

Experiences of being parented were cited as an important influence, as was advice from other mothers. This included participants' own mothers, though some considered this advice outdated. It is important to note that the mothers who had experienced poor parenting tended to avoid, dismiss, or not be exposed to, contemporary advice from their own mothers. Some advice from other mothers was granted authority because they had parenting experience, though there was also mixing of medical and other professionalisation, which for some provided or added authority (for example the influence of individuals who were doctors as well as mothers). There were references to broad cultural influences, the influence of religion, politics, medical professionals, parenting experts, and experiences of work and education. Mothers also discussed the influence of the media and the media as a source of advice. Though sometimes only hinted at in mothers' testimonies, in an era of 'deep mediatization' (Hepp and Hasebrink, 2017), I acknowledge that many of the other sources of influence are likely experienced through the media.

Some mothers interviewed cited examples of specific behaviours they had consciously altered due to a media message. These conscious changes were largely to do with commercial recommendations or safety awareness. Several mothers spoke more broadly about unavoidable, unconscious influence. They did not relate this to any specific behavioural changes but there was a suggestion that this may induce a more general attitude change. Related to this, there was discussion of the power of the media to shape public opinion and the importance of representations and normalisation. In these suggestions of unconscious influence there is perhaps support for some of the early theories of media influence such as the Hypodermic Effects theory and Cultivation theory (see Chapter Two, section 2.4.2). However, critique and conscious selection of media messages by mothers suggests more complex processes of influence may be at play.

Mothers in interviews and, to an extent online, suggested that while they themselves may not be susceptible to media influence, others might be. Some argued that differences in experience, education and age may make some mothers, and children, susceptible to media influence, which could be harmful to wellbeing. There are possible links here to media effects theories of Uses and Gratification and Two Step Flow (see Chapter Two, sections 2.4.2 and 2.4.3). Giddens argued that people incorporate "mediated experiences" into their lives in selective ways, which may not be fully conscious (Giddens, 1991, page 188 cited Seale, 2002, page 14). There was one instance where an interviewee (Paige) made an argument for a mechanism of media influence similar to Milkie's notion of 'reflected

appraisals' (1999, pages 203 and 205), where media representations may be used to 'fill in the gaps' of knowledge of others in order to form opinions on them.

In reference to Seale's (2003) articulation of a feedback loop between media audiences and producers, I outlined some of the ways in which mothers mentioned the influence that they had, as media audiences, on media producers. These methods included sending in comments and complaints and the power of popularity (in ratings and as a consumer market). I argued that the internet has radically altered the relationship between media audience and producer, making communication between the groups more direct and immediate, and in other ways, demolishing the boundary between the groups (so audience is also producer and vice versa).

As a steppingstone between answering different elements of Research Question Two, I used two intermediary research questions to work through the analysis necessary to address this relatively wide-ranging question. These were questions 2a and 2b.

2a) What are the main media channels mothers consider they are exposed to?

All the mothers interviewed used social media of some kind, most *Facebook*, but some actively chose to avoid the platform. Most mothers interviewed did not read newspapers or magazines. Few of the same television programmes were mentioned by more than one mother. However, several reported listening (via radio, seven mothers), watching (via television, one mother), or reading (via websites and apps, four mothers) *BBC News*.

There was variation in the types of media referred to by mothers interviewed and those using the online forum. This may be accounted for by medium: online newspapers lend themselves well to the mechanisms of use of online forums and were frequently referenced. Particular newspapers may have been more commonly referenced due to demographic variations in the sample though there was noticeable frequency of reference to the *Daily Mail* on online forums, which I suggest may be related to it being perceived as controversial and therefore likely to stimulate conversation.

2b) How do Mothers Perceive Broadcast and Social Media to Represent Parenting?

To analyse these perceptions, I initially focussed on considerations of accuracy and realism. Mothers in interviews were specifically concerned with accuracy and veracity in media representations of ill/health and several talked of only trusting information on the NHS website. Interviewees were more accepting of pluralist views, from other mothers via social media, in relation to consumer reviews and local knowledge. Online forum users

seemed to similarly value accuracy and realism with regards to health and there were multiple arguments that tabloid newspapers should not be considered trustworthy. The only fictional representations of parenting cited by multiple mothers in interviews as realistic were the television programmes *The Letdown* and *Motherland*. These are both sitcoms where parenting is presented as chaotic, stressful and competitive and are both set in middle class, urban contexts. Following one mother's (Alison) comments, I suggest that these realistic representations may be recognised as similar to some of these mothers' real-life contexts but provide an opportunity for looking in from the outside and reflecting on one's own real-life behaviour and how that might be perceived. Alison suggested that representations of competitive, intensive mothers were an example she wanted to avoid.

7.2.3 Research Question Three: What Impact do Mothers Think Their Parenting Identities and Behaviours and the Media Have on Their Wellbeing?

Mothers online and in interviews described different media images to be variously distressing, perfectionist, pressurising, heart-warming, reassuring and socially useful. According to participants, parenting identities and behaviours affected their wellbeing in ways which could be considered negative and positive.

Some mothers indicated that they found certain media images distressing because they linked them to their own parenting identities or practices. The media in this sense seemed to operate as a reflexive trigger. There was some suggestion that media images may indicate wider social opinion and so some mothers felt judgement or pressured in relation to their parenting experiences or practices. Media representations of family life were described by some mothers online as 'heart-warming'. Social media was cited as having a positive impact on maternal wellbeing through providing exposure to information that improved wellbeing, reassurance, and developing or enhancing social relationships.

Splitting conceptualisations of wellbeing in to five of the domains set out by the Office of National Statistics (2019) demonstrated the perceived wide-ranging impacts of parenting beliefs, practices and contexts on wellbeing. Mothers online and in interviews spoke about how motherhood impacted their life satisfaction mainly for the better, with comments about joyful aspects of parenting but also "vulnerability" as a new mother. Intensive mothering, in concern about not behaving in a sufficiently child centred way, was associated with feelings of guilt. Some mothers spoke of fears of harm coming to their children through their actions or inactions, which could be seen as an endorsement of parental determinism being associated with increased worry and therefore lower wellbeing. Motherhood affected social relationships in various ways including causing tension and

alienation from existing relationships and the formation of new ones. Breastfeeding and discipline were areas where mothers reported feelings of intense social scrutiny. Some mothers mentioned physical pain caused by childbirth, breastfeeding and accidental injury. Mothers reflected on the impact of hormones on their feelings, and I suggested that this reflection may provide opportunity for separation (and therefore explanation of variance) between what mothers considered rational thought and their actual reactions. Motherhood was reported as exacerbating one mother's pre-existing anxiety, be associated with new episodes of low mood or depression in two mothers and was thought by one mother to have improved her mental health.

7.3 Links Between Findings

In this section, I will explain, then critique, a hypothesis linking findings related to different research questions.

Based on testimony from some interviewed mothers, I developed a hypothesis that self-perceived poor parenting experienced as a child led, in turn, to: strong endorsement of parental determinism; avoidance of their own mother's advice; high exposure to media and parent training (which further reinforced messages of parental determinism); worry and/ or guilt about not parenting in ways sufficiently aligned to parental determinism; and ultimately to reduced wellbeing (Fig. 7.1).

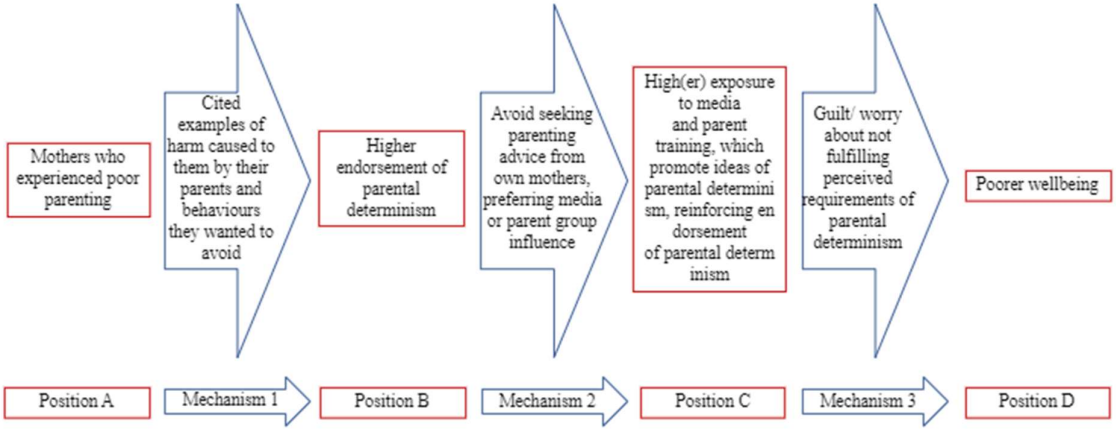


Figure 7.1: *Hypothesis linking early childhood experience to parental determinism and wellbeing.*

Before qualifying this hypothesis, I will summarise the main evidence supporting it. Alison and Iona's accounts could be seen to demonstrate this progression. I presented quotes in

Chapters Four, Five and Six where they made comments fitting each of these stages, for example:

- Alison and Iona talked about harms they had experienced related to the way they were parented (Position A and Mechanism 1).
- Alison expressed sentiments indicating high endorsement of parental determinism (Position B).
- Iona linked the parenting she experienced and later mental health problems, which implied high endorsement of parental determinism. This was cited as a key influence to Iona's parenting of her own children (Position A, Mechanism 1, Position B).
- At another point in the interview, harms possibly caused by parenting Alison experienced were cited as an influence on her own parenting behaviours, and she was sceptical of advice from her mother as a result of these reflections (Mechanisms 1 and 2).
- Both mothers sought parenting advice online and both attended parenting training/ groups (Mechanism 2).
- The media seemed to be a particularly important influence on Alison and parenting groups particularly important for Iona (Position C).
- Iona referenced not being able to get advice from her own parents as a reason parenting groups have been so key for her (Mechanism 2).
- The messages she recounted from these groups seemed clearly aligned to parental deterministic ideals (Position C).
- Alison recounted media messages about parenting that were aligned to parental determinism, arguably in quite exaggerated ways (Position C).
- Both mothers made comments indicating instances of worry, fear, anxiety and potential guilt about their parenting actions in ways that could be considered related to issues of parental determinism (Mechanism 3).
- I argue that their accounts of worry and guilt amount to indications of reduced wellbeing (Position D).
- Iona and Alison both also made comments showing a direct link between media messages, parental determinism (or perhaps intensive mothering), and reduced wellbeing (Position C, Mechanism 4, Position D).

As can be seen in Chapters Four, Five and Six, there were other mothers who also reported experiencing poor parenting and who also strongly endorsed parental determinism, others who dismissed advice from their parents. There was ubiquitous engagement with media of some form, and common attendance of parenting groups. My analysis did not suggest any outright rejection of parental determinism, though there were mixed impacts on wellbeing by media representations and in relation to parenting identities and beliefs. In short, there were examples of each position and mechanism from other mothers. However, their comments did not link together in ways aligned to my hypothesis. In the findings chapters I presented selected quotes from Alison and Iona which could be used to illustrate the theory of escalation shown in Figure 7.1. However, Alison and Iona made other comments which contradict at least some elements of it. For example, Iona's joy in parenting and scepticism about some media messages and Alison's comments about being a good enough mother, positive impacts of media messages and dismissal of parenting books.

Although I do think there is a link between having experienced poor parenting and endorsement of parental determinism, progression through the other stages of this model seem much more complex. Also, although Alison and Iona both commented on impacts on their wellbeing related to media images and parenting beliefs, they identified anxiety and low mood as pre-existing conditions. Though both recounted instances where these conditions may have been exacerbated by parenting beliefs and/ or media images, they were already familiar feelings for them. Alison and Iona suggested that their later mental health issues may be related to the parenting they received, which is aligned to research and literature about Adverse Childhood Experiences. Their comments indicated poorer overall wellbeing, in some ways, than other mothers in the sample. However, it could be that this is related entirely to their childhood experiences, effectively supporting the parental determinism thesis.

The hypothesis provides a neat link between the issues studied. However, the relationships between influences to parenting, media influence more generally, parenting beliefs and practices, and links to wellbeing are just more complicated than the simple model I presented. Given the focus of the study, a major flaw of the model is in relation to the influence of the media. There is an assumption that more reliance on the media as an influence has negative impacts on wellbeing. In some ways this makes sense: my own and others' research has shown that media representations supporting parental determinism and intensive mothering are common (see Chapter Two, Section 2.2) and that endorsement of parental determinism and intensive mothering ideals can have negative impacts on

wellbeing (Rizzo et al, 2013; Romagnoli and Wall, 2012). It is easy to extrapolate that these types of media representations of parenting have a reinforcing and perhaps pressuring effect on the audience's perceptions of appropriate parenting, which may then lead to reduced wellbeing. However, as scholars of the media have long argued (see Morley, 1999, pages 120-121), media influence is not as simple as that. An audience is not a blank canvas, indiscriminately absorbing messages from the media.

There may be scope for an argument around the importance of media literacy: that some people may lack skills in critical appraisal required to adequately assess and dismiss media messages that are harmful, untrue, or unhelpful. Some mothers interviewed argued to the effect that other people, due to lack of education, experience, or because they were younger, may be more susceptible to negative media influence. Two of the mothers who made this argument, Gillian and Rebecca, spoke about regular use of social media. It seemed to me that social media formed quite important parts of their lives and how they spent their time. Rebecca felt separated from existing social ties, and carefully curated a social media profile for herself and her baby in order to make new social connections with local parents. Rebecca's social media use provided opportunity for new social connections, support and arguably enhanced wellbeing. Further than this, her frequent use of social media and the enmeshing of her social relationships with the digital could be construed as her living in 'deep mediatization' (Hepp and Hasebrink, 2017). As referenced in Chapter Five, Couldry and Hepp (2017, page 2) argued that social media is different to traditional media in that is it not "specific channels of centralized content", but rather the spaces where people "*enact* the social". Perhaps in cases like Rebecca's where media interactions are not just information sources but important elements of social interaction, the arguments should not be so much about media literacy but social literacy. From a social constructionist perspective, people's attitudes and beliefs are a product of their social experiences. The question then becomes about how does one avoid taking on harmful attitudes, in this case perhaps including endorsement of parental determinism and intensive mothering ideals, if those are the ideas of appropriate parenting prevalent in the world as has been personally experienced?

My analysis of the data I collected indicates a relationship between experiencing poor parenting and endorsing parental determinism, and between endorsement of parental determinism (and related concepts like intensive mothering and paranoid parenting) and reduced wellbeing. The first point is about how social experiences, and later reflections on them, affect attitudes towards other social relationships. The second is about attitudes

towards social relationships affecting emotionally charged, socially dependent, thought processes like worry and guilt. The research findings are primarily about how people exist in their social worlds and are inherently complicated. The media clearly has a role in participants' construction of their social worlds, as infrastructure and representation, and though many impacts are seemingly somewhat idiosyncratic, I argue that some useful connections can be made between identities and audience reception.

7.4 Implications for Policy and Practice

This section focusses on two examples of how changes to policy and practice could improve maternal wellbeing. This is not intended as an exhaustive list of such issues, but rather offers some lenses through which changes might be considered.

7.4.1 Media Literacy

Some mothers argued that other people may be more susceptible to negative effects of media influence due to lack of education or experience. There is an implication in these arguments that while the interviewee has particular skills to understand and critique media messages, others may not. Government research in England and Scotland (National Literacy Trust, 2017; Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2012, page 2; Scottish Government, 2010a) indicates that many adults may not have the literacy skills to critically evaluate media texts to assess their usefulness, truth, and context. If a person cannot effectively evaluate such media messages, it seems entirely possible that they may be harmed by acting inappropriately in response to them.

The Scottish Government acknowledged literacy deficiencies and produced strategic guidance with the overarching aim of raising "standards of literacy for all from the early years through to adulthood" (Scottish Government, 2010b, page 4). The guidance initially framed literacy, and ways to improve it, relatively holistically (Scottish Government, 2010b, page 7), before describing the rationale for improving literacy in more mercenary terms and promoting parental deterministic ideals, which I would argue may not be beneficial to maternal wellbeing (Scottish Government, 2010b, page 10).

A more philosophical concern with the association of literacy (or lack thereof) and not being able "to spot fake news or bias in the media", is about considerations of truth. As discussed in Chapter Five, Stuart Hall argued several decades ago that studies of media representation should move away from being concerned with accuracy, which assumes fixed notions of reality and truth, to more complex examinations of power and varying

interpretations of media images. The rise of the digital to a key information source and means of social interaction for many people, combined with some recent high-profile political events (including the Brexit referendum and the 2016 US election), has brought concern with 'fake news' to the forefront of some debates about media literacy. This is demonstrated by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Literacy's report on *Fake News and Critical Literacy* (National Literacy Trust, 2018), which very much centres concern about fake news. I'd argue that the complete focus on 'fake news' in the report, unhelpfully negates acknowledgment of pluralist, dynamic truth, and the complexity of the social construction of reality, while engendering an overall sense of fear about a changing mediascape.

Some might expect younger adults, as 'digital natives', to be more au fait with the digital. However, summarising US research, Yeoman and Morris (2020) argue that there is a generation of young people who "have no idea where their information online comes from, or why they are reading it". In the sample of mothers I interviewed, the younger mothers were not the ones who seemed to me to most confidently navigate the digital. Mothers of various ages, for example Elizabeth (aged 26), Rebecca (early 30s), Lauren (36), and Gillian (42), talked of using multiple social media platforms to engage with outputs and discussion related to music, arts and cultural issues of specific interest to them. It is not age but something else which means these mothers are not only skilful but willing participants in the digital. The 'something else' is difficult to identify, but I wonder if it is related to seeing opportunities for information and connections in the digital which are not available from traditional media or existing, offline social relationships.

The Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee has lobbied for digital literacy to become the "fourth pillar of education, alongside reading, writing and maths" (2018, page 63), though the Government has denied there is a need to expand the curriculum in this way (Yeoman and Morris, 2020). Yeoman and Morris have argued that media education in schools should be broader than focussing on fake news and suggested that there is "space for a bottom-up response to this information crisis. The future electorate must be taught how to navigate the modern news landscape" (2020). I would argue for an even more bottom-up approach to the issue than lessons in schools, rather a need for a discursive shift from viewing digital media with suspicion, to viewing it as opportunity. This is not to say that I don't see a need for digital education in schools, but that this education would not be about the menace of the digital, or necessarily as discrete lessons, but rather about how news and information is contextualised, perhaps in the study of humanities, arts and social

sciences. Orgad has commented that debate about the internet has often been formed from two polar ideas: "celebratory and utopian explanations verses moral panic and dystopian account[s]" (2020, page vii). I do not propose a discursive shift to some utopic vision, but rather, in common with Das (2020d), suggest a more ambivalent view of the positive and negative impacts digital media might have on wellbeing, in the most holistic of senses. There must be recognition of the importance of digital and other media in contemporary societies.

It is possible that 'fake news', disseminated through digital media, receives such political attention partly because it is new, but also because it presents a threat to existing, long held, political relationships with the media. In contrast to relative political enthusiasm for people to be educated to avoid fake news on social media, media studies have been dismissed and referred to as a 'Mickey Mouse' subject (Brabazon et al, 2019; Turner and Kirk, 2018). In defence of media studies, Brabazon et al (2019) argues that dismissal of the subject is contextualised by anti-intellectualism, where "knowing is an inconvenience and feeling [is] a priority, [therefore] experience is a welcome substitute for expertise". That "everyone" uses social media implies to some that understanding the media does not require particular expertise (Brabazon et al, 2019). However, Brabazon et al's (2019) argument continues that the combination in media studies, of theory and production, gives unique insight to understandings of political and popular use of the media.

There is distain for media studies from some politicians, typically on the right of the political spectrum, and in representations in mainstream media, particularly the *Daily Mail* (Brabazon et al, 2020). I don't know how common this distain is more broadly, and there is some irony that interrogation of the relationship between political and media distain and broader public opinion would require expertise and research in the field of media studies. I suggest that a perceptive shift in consideration of media studies generally and inclusion of more media studies (in the sense alluded to above) in standard education, would likely enhance popular understandings of and capacity to critique media messages, including the distain for the subject expressed by some politicians and media outlets.

Much of the discussion about participation in the digital assumes equity of access, when of course there is enormous disparity. This has been highlighted, in part, by the coronavirus lockdown, where the digital has become a key route of communication with people and services outside the home. Without access to the internet and a device suitable to do so on, people have and will struggle to maintain and find new employment, participate in

education, seek financial and other support from the state, join parenting groups, and have social interactions. Clearly, this must change for there to be any worth in changes to digital literacy education or discursive shifts about the digital. More than this though, it is already becoming time that digital access is necessary for participation in broad areas of social existence, so there must be changes to affordability and infrastructure which would allow more universal access.

I also want to flag a major ethical concern with an observation of the new media landscape causing harm to some people, and a policy imperative to do with media literacy. It seems to me that associating the harm that has come to people with a deficiency of some sort on their part is akin to victim blaming, and I consider that unethical. If it has been identified that harm is caused by the media, it should be the media that changes, not the people who are harmed. I propose that these changes to the media should be through regulation. This regulation clearly has many technological difficulties and challenges, though political motives may, in some instances, result in reticence to act.

7.4.2 Midwives, Health Visitors and Breastfeeding Guidance

My analysis highlighted a range of mothers feeling pressured and even bullied by health professionals (midwives and health visitors), particularly in relation to breastfeeding. Mothers also reported intense social scrutiny in relation to other parenting activities, like discipline. However, I have selected breastfeeding as an exemplar issue as it has clear significance to professional practice.

In 2018, news outlets reported on Royal College of Midwives guidance to midwives that mothers who make an informed decision not to breastfeed should have their decision respected and be supported (Embury-Dennis, 2018; Press Association, 2018). The news reports contextualise the announcement with a previous warning from the National Childbirth Trust that "women can face judgment or feel guilty about the decisions they make when it comes to feeding their baby" (Embury-Dennis, 2018; Press Association, 2018). The Royal College of Midwives' guidance document it relates to, however, strikes a somewhat different tone with the assertion that breastfeeding is "the most appropriate method of infant feeding" (Royal College of Midwives, 2018, page 2). The document continues, "if, after being given appropriate information, advice and support on breastfeeding, a woman chooses not to do so, or to give formula as well as breastfeeding, her choice must be respected" (Royal College of Midwives, 2018, page 2). It seems midwives are advised to not so much support choice, but limit lobbying once a mother announces her decision to go against their advice. The proficiencies for midwives and

standards for midwifery training are unequivocal in the pedestalling of breastfeeding (Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2019, pages 10 and 19; Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2009, page 52). The attitudes of the midwives who some mothers felt pressurised them about breastfeeding were not 'bad apples' but seemingly following directives necessary for their professional registration.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council regulatory documents also include stipulations about midwives using and responding to research evidence (Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2019, page 14) and that their practise should be "women-centred" (Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2009, page 6). Joan Wolf's work would suggest a contradiction between stipulations for unequivocal support for breastfeeding, responding to research evidence and being "woman centred". Wolf has critiqued the "overwhelming consensus that breastfeeding is the optimal form of nutrition for virtually all babies everywhere" with arguments that research evidence for the benefits of breastfeeding is somewhat inconclusive (2011, pages xi and xii). Wolf uses the term 'total motherhood' to describe a context where "good mothering is defined as behavior that reduces even infinitesimal or poorly understood risks to offspring, regardless of the potential cost to the mother" (2011, page xv). In an ethic of total motherhood, though the benefits to the baby are not clear, breastfeeding is unequivocally promoted, and costs to the mother like lack of bodily autonomy, pain, inconvenience and disruption to work and other activities, are dismissed as irrelevant.

How can these tensions and uncertainties exist and there still be such strong support, from multiple parties, for breastfeeding? Wolf argues

> [Breastfeeding] is invoked by those who believe that what is "natural"—breastfeeding is perceived to be an organic process—is inherently best, but it also confirms the authority of science: research purports to demonstrate that breast milk is nutritionally optimal. It is embraced by grassroots women's health advocates as well as by institutional medicine … that health activists have long mistrusted. It serves liberal, radical, and cultural feminist ends at the same time that it appeals to non- and even antifeminists. Like manna from heaven, said to taste like whatever the person eating it desires, breastfeeding appears to have virtually unlimited meaning.
>
> Wolf, 2011, pages xv and xvi

I wonder if it is breastfeeding's multi-relevance that means such a tension can exist in midwifery regulations and practice. Breastfeeding is held in midwives' professional regulations in a position apparently supported by research evidence. It is also seen as 'natural' and avoiding medical and commercial interference, which perhaps aligns to

political conceptualisations of the midwifery profession and individual feminist positions. The sticking point though is with regards to practice which is ‘woman centred’. My analysis suggests that when midwives suggested incorporating formula feeding, this was experienced by women as being a response to them as individuals (Iona is a notable exception to this).

I argue that more nuanced regulatory support for breastfeeding might provide scope for midwives to have more nuanced conversations with mothers about infant feeding. At a higher level though, it is unclear why research, including meta-analyses, showing more tentative conclusions on the benefits of breastfeeding are not more publicised and have not been incorporated into the guidance of major health organisations. Without acknowledgement of any uncertainty around breastfeeding benefits from major health organisations, and more ambivalent professional regulations, midwifery curricula cannot really be amended to allow for critical debate on advice about infant feeding. The midwives that mothers spoke about in terms which might suggest they were ‘woman centred’ were perhaps being guided by practice, more than educational experience. If midwifery training were more ambivalent about breastfeeding, it is possible that more mothers might encounter midwives who considered the impacts of infant feeding on the mother and baby on more equitable terms.

7.5 Epilogue

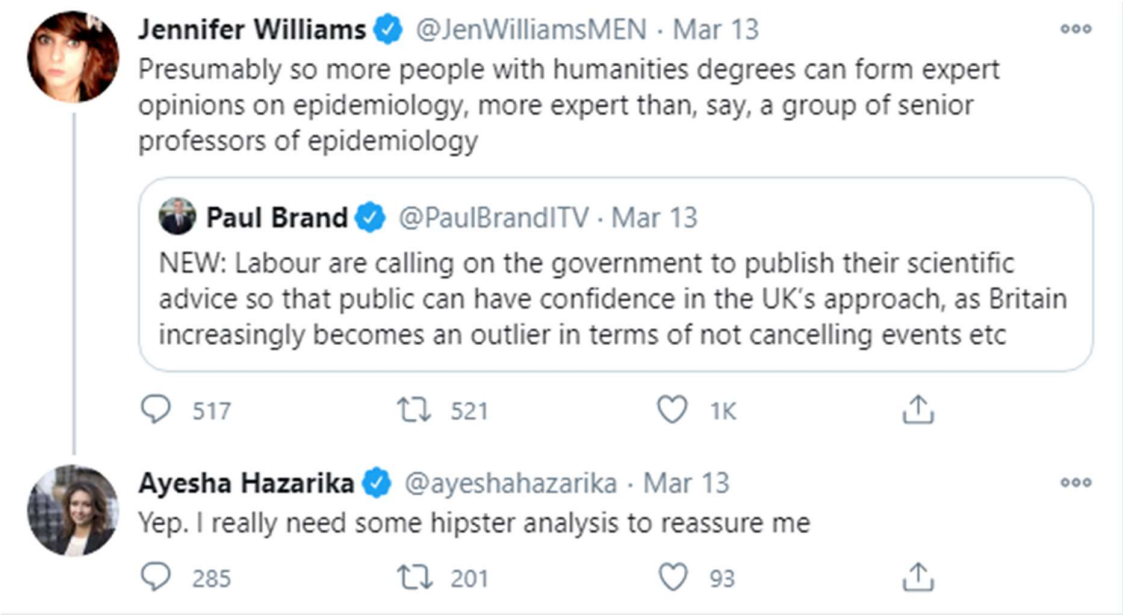
I began this PhD in September 2016. Data were collected mainly in 2018, the bulk of data analysis took place starting in 2019 and writing up in 2020 and 2021. All research is socially contextualised and of course as time goes on, these contexts may shift and change, altering the meanings, for critique of the social, of the research findings. Around and during the time of this project, there have been some events which may have particular relevance for readings of this research. The central event I am referring to is the COVID-19 pandemic and related 'lockdowns’, but also relevant is the aftermath of the Brexit referendum. These major events have an impact on reflections on topics in this project in several ways, three of which I consider here. The first is in consideration of experts, the second in altering the dynamic between mediated and in-person communication, entertainment and employment, and the third in evaluations of risk.

7.5.1 Experts

With regards to the authority of experts, Ryan (2020) outlined a radical change in political reverence between Brexit in 2016 and the coronavirus pandemic of 2020. Ryan (2020)

contrasts Michael Gove's declaration shortly before the Brexit referendum that "we have had enough of experts" with frequent use of the phrase in daily government coronavirus briefings, that they are "led by the science". The Brexit referendum, argued Ryan, was characterised by emotion and ideology and news reports often featured the opinions of the "'ordinary man/ woman' in the street" (Ryan, 2020). "The Brexit debates epitomised the resurgence of populism, the role of social media and so–called 'post-truth', in forging an environment of false equivalence where all opinions seem to be equally valid and those who shout the loudest are the most compelling" (Ryan, 2020). This reflection of Ryan's seems particularly poignant to the discussions of truth, pluralist interpretations, and of course (social) media representations, which have appeared at various points in this thesis. Ryan's argument for why media and government discussion around Brexit was often emotional opinion expressed by 'ordinary people' and coronavirus responses were led by expert guidance from scientists, is to do with immediacy. Ryan argued that Brexit was a 'jam tomorrow' scenario, where appealing promises could be made which would only be evaluated, if at all, in the distant future. With coronavirus though, and daily reporting of alarming mortality figures, political promises about testing, for example, were immediately publicly evaluated and critiqued.

This study of parenting cultures has included discussion of experts and of trust in, and authority of, advice. This has necessarily focussed on parenting, however, shifting considerations of experts more generally are clearly relevant. Without further research, it is not possible to know how, or if, mothers' views on experts, and their advice with regards to parenting, has changed. Based on the data I collected, particularly in interviews, I would suggest that the argument put forward by Ryan as rationale for changing attention to experts is not only to do with immediacy, but also to do with attitudes to medical and particular types of scientific expertise, compared to experts in other areas of study. There was widespread trust, from mothers interviewed, in advice and expertise from medical and health care professionals. Where other experts were mentioned, there was less reverence, as illustrated by Alison's comment "we've got a stack of baby books there, which I could honestly drop kick across the room. They are the biggest load of crap in the world". At different stages of the coronavirus pandemic, there have been examples of general dismissal of expertise in some areas of academic study, in favour of medical or 'hard science' expertise. I was particularly struck by this when reading the following Twitter exchange between journalists Jennifer Williams and Ayesha Hazarika:



Twitter, 2020

The comments from journalists, who have been granted some prestige by way of their blue Twitter verification ticks, show clear distain for "hipster analysis", provided by people with expertise in the humanities, but also presumably other subject areas. These Tweets were written in March, before the UK had any form of lockdown. Within two weeks the UK did enter a lockdown which lasted several months and with restrictions of some form for the remainder of 2020 and in to 2021 (the time of writing this). When ordering lockdowns, the Government referred to their scientific advisers, and changing scientific advice, but there was no real acknowledgement within this of there not being a single, true, scientific response. This complex situation required multiple studies and multiple interpretations of them.

The analysis I presented in this thesis indicated more trust in medical expertise than other expertise. I have presented some accounts indicating an exacerbation, in the public imagination, of this disparity in trust following the coronavirus pandemic. As an area of future research, I suggest that questioning mothers with children of various ages, and pregnant women, about trust in expert opinion as the impacts of COVID-19 evolve may provide insight into considerations of different types of expertise and the relationship between these differing considerations and personal positions and experience. It is currently unknown how mothers might, for example, conceptualise risk of harm to themselves and their children in terms of contracting coronavirus but also in terms of social

isolation, education and employment, and how advice from different sources might be involved in these considerations.

7.5.2 Media

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions on movement, socialising and businesses and services deemed non-essential altered the daily lives and activities of most people in the UK, including mothers. In lockdown, there was a radical change in the ratio of social support and interactions practised offline with that online. New mothers in the early part of the pandemic would have seen mass closure of parent and baby groups, midwife and health visitor consultations may have been carried out by telephone, baby weigh-ins were cancelled and visits from friends and relatives banned. In this period, most interactions mothers were having with people they did not live with, were mediated. Mothers of older children would also have been affected: they may have been working from home via remote desktop connections while trying to entertain and/or educate their children as their nurseries, schools or other childcare services were closed, or for even older children, this may have affected when they left the family home to go to university or work. Social interactions were by text message, phone call, video chat, letter or social media.

There were major changes to people's media use, particularly in the early stages of the pandemic. In April 2020, people in Scotland watched an average of 5 hours 46 minutes television per day, almost an hour and a half more than the average in 2019 (Ofcom, 2020a, page 4). In 2019, the most watched television programme in Scotland was *Line of Duty,* followed by *Gavin and Stacy,* a drama and a comedy programme (Ofcom, 2020b, slide 5). In the first half of 2020, the most watched television programme in Scotland was the *BBC News Special* on 23rd March (the day lockdown measures were introduced), followed by a *Prime Ministerial Statement* on 10th May (when there was some easing of the first lockdown restrictions) (Ofcom, 2020b, slide 5). In April 2020, adults in the UK spent an average of just over four hours online everyday (Ofcom, 2020c). This is over half an hour more than the daily average six months before (Ofcom, 2020c). Perhaps predictably, considerably more British adults were regularly making video calls during lockdown than before (more than 70% of adults were making at least weekly video-calls in lockdown compared to 35% before) (Ofcom, 2020c).

In the early period of the pandemic, Das carried-out research interviews with perinatal women (those pregnant or with babies) in the UK about the effects of COVID-19 on their lives, anxieties and the 'digital pivot' (Das, 2020a) The report outlined attempts by various

organisations to carry out services online due to the closure of face-to-face activities. Das detailed the various changes to services' modi operandi and acknowledged the speed of the changes and the challenges of the circumstances (Das, 2020b). However, she was wary of "techno-euphoria" and argued that shifts to the digital, far from relieving some problems, may exacerbate them (Das, 2020c). Das argued replacing face-to-face interactions with digital ones in services to do with mental health or domestic abuse mean that these interactions are probably taking place in the home, within earshot of others, altering or diminishing the usefulness of the interventions. There were also choices made as to which services were be moved online or stopped in-person, like baby weigh-in clinics, seemingly on the grounds that they were not essential. However, argued Das, these choices could be seen to have been determined non-essential for the baby, not the mother (who might find opportunities for support, perhaps away from their partners, that they might not otherwise) which further exacerbates social prioritising of children over their mothers. A key finding in Das' report was that the rapid switch to digital, rather than face-to-face social interactions had differing impacts depending on existing social contexts: "I found that people with difficult relationships with their family and friends offline, generally found fewer supportive connections online. For those who already had strong connections, technology helped massively to strengthen them during the lockdown" (Das, 2020c). This is somewhat at odds with my own findings where some mothers who found their social contexts lacking, searched out new social contacts online. I suggested in Chapter Six that this difference in our findings may be to do with timings of our research, though there may also be some significance in considerations of 'media affinity', which I have discussed earlier in this chapter. Duration is also important; mothers in my study with limited offline connections may have cultivated online ones over a long period of time, whereas the mothers in Das' study had to adapt quickly to new circumstances.

Das' report (2020) in this area gave the first insights from research, that I have found, into the impact of coronavirus on mothers and the 'digital pivot'. The research was carried out and the report published all in a very short period of time, which has been very useful for me in writing this thesis but means that only a very discrete context was captured. The interviews took place in April 2020, at the height of the first UK lockdown and with pregnant women or those who had recently given birth. There is a clear need for research exploring impacts of the coronavirus pandemic as it evolves, and with mothers of older children as well as those in the 'perinatal stage'. Also, as I noted earlier, the pandemic has

been associated with changes to non-digital media engagements and so research into maternal use of other media may also provide valuable insights.

7.5.3 Risk

The coronavirus pandemic produced social contexts which are for many people completely unprecedented. There were government orders on how people should alter they daily lives, and there has also been seemingly limitless mediated information circulating featuring other actions people should take. The way people have made sense of these media messages, and the degree to which they have aligned themselves with the actions suggested, must have required some evaluations of risk. Evaluation of the risk of contracting the virus, and/or transmitting it, evaluations of the trustworthiness of the advice, evaluations of the impact of the carrying out actions suggested and evaluations of social risks to do with normative and deviant behaviour. For mothers these considerations have an added complexity in that the evaluations of risk are not just for themselves but for their children as well. I have been particularly struck by this in discussions of school closures, or rather openings.

Schools closed in the UK in March 2020 during the first lockdown. There was an expectation of home-schooling, which most parents carried out (ONSb, 2020). Right from the outset of considerations of coronavirus for those living in the UK, there was the impression that children were not as badly harmed as adults: from at least early March 2020, UK media reported that children were much less likely to become seriously ill from coronavirus than adults (Gallagher, 2020). The government sought to reopen schools at times when other restrictions for adults were still in place (BBC, 2020b; Gallagher, S., 2020). Key government advisers acknowledged the risk of children contracting and spreading coronavirus but argued that these risks were outweighed by the risks of children not returning to school (Schraer, 2020). News reporting of parents' concern about sending their children to reopened schools featured discussions evaluating risk of coronavirus transmission and risks of impeding children's social and educational development (Lightfoot, 2020; BBC, 2020c; Weale, 2020). In the first lockdown, over 40% of parents home-schooling surveyed by the Office of National Statistics reported the activities were negatively affecting their job (ONSb, 2020). There have been arguments that schools were prematurely opened to provide childcare so parents' work could maintain the economy (BBC, 2020c; Berry, 2020), which were perhaps linked to the perceived impact of home-schooling on parents' work.

Studies of parenting cultures inevitably feature some weaving between notions of public, private, and political. Discussions around school attendance in the context of coronavirus can be seen to provide an acute example of this weaving in relation to risk. The government has been perceived to be balancing risks of harm to population mortality and morbidity with risks to the economy. This has consequences for parents' evaluation of risk of individual viral transmission with risks to children's education and social development, their own employment and possible sanctions for children's truancy.

School attendance figures in English and Scottish schools in the Autumn term 2020 were considerably lower than the average in 2019, the discrepancy between which was only partially explained by direct exposure to COVID-19 (Department for Education, 2020; UK Government, 2020; Sleight, 2020). By Autumn 2020, some research had begun into the concerns of parents in relation to their children and schooling under coronavirus. The CO-SPACE study surveyed 1600 parents and carers in the UK in July 2020 and found "just 6.2%" were not at all comfortable with sending their child to school, 66.4% were very comfortable and 27.5% were "a bit" comfortable (Shum et al, 2020, page 5). The most common concern cited about their child returning to school was "the practicalities of my child being in/ not in school" (31.4%), with concerns directly related to coronavirus cited by only about half that number (Shum et al, 2020, page 7). There was some indication from the surveys that BME parents and parents on low incomes were less comfortable about children returning to school than white, more affluent parents (Shum et al, 2020, pages 7 and 18). While it might be possible to speculate about the reasons these differences between groups of parents exists, I would argue that these findings prompt a need for qualitative research to explore these issues. It would be useful to have a sociological examination of the evaluations of relative risk parents make with regards to coronavirus generally and children's attendance at schools and other activities more specifically. The FACT COVID study proposed to use data collected via an app to explore "the challenges experienced by families with children in the UK during the time of Covid 19 as well as … how individuals respond to public health measures put in place (such as social distancing measures), and how these are negotiated with others in the household and family" (FACT COVID, 2020). At a presentation of initial findings, risk was identified as a key theme of analysis, and there was discussion of how considerations of risk may be impacted by parents' ethnicity, income and other factors (Faircloth, 2020).

7.5.4 Future research

As outlined in the previous subsections, there are certain facets of the changes to social life caused by the coronavirus pandemic which may have particular relevance for topics and issues related to this PhD project. I have cited, where known, some recent or ongoing research which addresses these aspects. I argue additional research addressing the crossover and intersection of changes to mediation, opinions of experts, and of risk would provide valuable insights to parenting culture studies. I would like to know how the views of mothers I interviewed had changed as a result of the COVID pandemic. For example, how have their media habits altered, their access and use of services, their jobs, time spent with their children, their concerns for and about their children and how they evaluate advice? There is now a data set with their views on these issues captured before the pandemic, with which new data could be compared. Related to this, I think useful insights could be gained from discussing the escalation hypothesis I proposed in an earlier section with mothers either who I have previously interviewed or perhaps ones I have not. I think there may well be scope through this activity to prompt critical discussion of elements which participants do and do not think ring true for them, as well as perhaps other influential factors which could be added to the model.

7.6 Summary

The aim of this project was to "examine how 'parental determinism' is understood by mothers, the role of the media in shaping these understandings, and how mothers perceive these understandings to impact on their wellbeing". This aim is comprised of three sections, each broadly addressed in a findings chapter (Chapters Four, Five and Six). Mothers had a range of levels of endorsement of parental determinism and I suggest that high endorsement is often related to reflecting on poor experiences of being parented. The role of the media in shaping maternal perceptions of parental determinism was extremely hard to pin down. Mothers recounted various media images which aligned to intensive mothering ideals and reviews of research on media representations and my own analysis of *BBC News* items found many representations of parental determinism. The influence of these representations was not overt though may be insidious. Mothers reported feelings of guilt and fear about their parenting actions and inactions and at times connected these feelings to media images, though also to the influence of other social relationships and interactions. In an era of 'deep mediatization', the separation between notions of the social and of media images are diminished.

Based largely on comments from two participants, I hypothesised an escalating link between poor childhood experiences, high endorsement of parental determinism, avoidance of contemporary advice from their mothers favouring the influence of parenting classes or the media, which reinforce ideas of parental determinism, leading to more worry and guilt about their parenting practices, and poorer wellbeing. I think this hypothesis, though potentially true in some ways, is limited. The causal chain is modified by other influences and possibly takes different forms in different people.

There are some firm conclusions that can be made from the data. Parental determinism is a prevalent idea amongst the mothers interviewed, the mothers contributing to the online forum, and in media representations studied. Mothers had varying levels of endorsement of parental determinism, with no outright refutation. Media influence is difficult to assess but is an important feature of social existence and can have positive and negative impacts on maternal wellbeing. Parental deterministic thinking prioritises the child over the mother, and can be experienced as pressurising, worrying, guilt inducing, physically painful, sleep depriving, autonomy diminishing, socially disruptive and employment altering. These experiences are largely negative for maternal wellbeing. It could be extrapolated that as the prioritising of children over their mothers in this type of thinking, which is a culturally prevalent idea, is negative to maternal wellbeing, that having children in the social conditions of contemporary society is necessarily negative for maternal wellbeing. However, data from mothers shows that this is not the case at all and many positives to child rearing were discussed, particularly in relation to life satisfaction and enjoyment. These joyful experiences and fulfilling life evaluations were at times in opposition to parental deterministic thinking.

7.7 Contribution to the Literature

This study is novel in the suggestion of a link between self-perceived experiences of poor parenting, and high(er) endorsement of parental determinism. Liss et al's (2012) study conceptualised intensive mothering in to five domains (Essentialism, Fulfilment, Stimulation, Challenging, Child-centred; see Chapter Two, section 2.3.3) and validated a tool to measure maternal endorsement of the various domains. Building on this, my study identified a key aspect of parental determinism, causality, and questioned mothers to ascertain their endorsement of it. As this was a qualitative study, unlike Liss et al's work, it

was not possible to attach numeric values to this endorsement, however, there was scope to examine why endorsement varied, which is how this novel conclusion has been reached.

There had been suggestion from scholars of parenting studies that the cultural expectations and conditions of contemporary parenting would have some sort of inevitable negative impact on parental, particularly maternal wellbeing (Bristow, 2014, page 102; Das, 2020d, page 114). However, these suggestions were somewhat unevidenced. Using Liss et al's tool to assess endorsement of intensive mothering, Rizzo et al (2013) were able to indicate that higher endorsement of the Essentialism, Challenging and Child-centred elements were associated with poorer maternal wellbeing. In my study, comments from a minority of mothers indicated that high endorsement of the causality aspect of parental determinism could be seen as directly negatively impacting their wellbeing. However, the qualitative methodology with in-depth interviews meant that a much more complex picture of the impacts to wellbeing of parenting could be developed. Mothers acknowledged hardships encountered in their parenting experiences, but also pay offs, compromises, and joy.

As evidenced in a literature review documented in Chapter Two (section 2.2), a wide selection of media representations have been found to support aspects of ideals of parental determinism and related concepts. A pertinent question following these findings must surely be what effect this has on mothers. Das noted that she had frequently heard arguments from lay and clinical publics "that it is high time one studied the 'effects' of the media on birthing women" (Das, 2020d, page 44). At the start of my study, I had not encountered research which looked at the links between the media, parenting cultures, and maternal wellbeing. Since then, a major contribution to the field, and one that addresses these three previously disparate areas, has come in the form of Das' monograph *Early Motherhood in Digital Societies; Ideals, Anxieties and Ties of the Perinatal* (2020d). In Das' book, she conceptualised a notion of a 'perinatal ideal', very much linked to intensive mothering. Following analysis of interviews with mothers, social media and online forum posts, and YouTube videos of hypnobirths, she suggested that these media may "impede and empower" perinatal mothers, and that it is impossible to "make sense of or support perinatality in Western societies today, entirely independently of media and communication technologies" (Das, 2020d, page 118). Das' monograph, though tying together similar, previously siloed, areas of sociological interest as this thesis, differs in significant ways from the arguments and focus presented here. One of these is Das' focus on anxiety(ies) with regards to maternal wellbeing. For Das, though she refutes universal experiences of maternal anxiety (page 95), this was a focus of her data analysis, which all

data sources could seemingly speak to. There was little mention of clinical understandings of anxiety, with an argument that perinatal anxiety should be approached "through a lens which is broader than the individual and the solely clinical, locating it within contemporary structural logics of the maternal" (Das, 2020d, page 95).

Another key divergence between Das' and my study is Das' foundation in communication studies and focus on the digital, as opposed to my own inclusion on the effects of representations found in a broad range of media, as cited by mothers. Das is critical of attempts to study media effects:

> The effect of the media on any political, social or cultural institution or process is always, perhaps, guaranteed to be a conversation peg, when in reality, the development of the field of media and communication studies has seen the development of the theorising of mediation as opposed to the effect of the media on something. This has meant a massive shift of focus from direct effects of the media, through empirical evidencing of audience activity, towards a more long-term interest in the ways in which the media is intrinsically woven into the processes of society
>
> Das, 2020d, pages 44 and 45

Rather than be disheartened by my apparently passe focus on the effects of media representations, I would argue that within this project I have been able to examine some of the enmeshed digital involvement in mothers' daily lives and intrinsic mediatisation of contemporary social interactions, while *also* making theoretical contributions to understandings of the effects of interpretations of media images. One of these was support for Milkie's (1999) theory of 'reflected appraisals' in some of Paige's comments (see Chapter Six, section 6.2.1). Another built on, or perhaps simply supported, Seale's (2003) argument that people use the media, as a repository of cultural scripts, to construct their identities. Alison's reflections on a fictional mother's behaviour in a media source she considered realistic served as a template for behaviour she wanted to avoid (see Chapter Five, section 5.5.1). I argued that this media image was operating as a sort of hypothetical or imagined potential alternate reality where Alison could view what these behaviours look like from the outside and avoid demonstrating them in her actual, lived reality.

With regards to how the media affects maternal wellbeing, my findings were mixed. On this issue, Das comments:

> Social structures and the actions of social actors, today, operate in a mediated world. This means the fundamental texture of these structures is mediated in ways which shape them both materially and symbolically. The mediated shaping of these structures, norms, ideals cannot be comprehended by asking "does technology

> make mothers more or less anxious", for that is a futile question. The real question then is, how do the arrival and uptake of newer technologies shape social conditions of anxiety both materially and affectively?
>
> Das, 2020d, pages 114-115

As previously mentioned, Das' focus on anxiety and digital media is somewhat different to my own, however, her dismissal of the question of *if*, in favour of *how* the media impacts wellbeing have relevance to my study. I concur with Das that there are material and affective media effects on maternal wellbeing. Media, particularly social media, had important roles in mothers' social lives. This was sometimes for the better, in forming or maintaining supportive social ties, but also sometimes for the worse, in facilitating a pressuring, or dismissive environment. Mothers also talked of how media images had symbolic impact on their wellbeing, through feeling reassured, or perceiving images as 'heart-warming', but also that they triggered concern, or guilt, particularly when reflected against their own parenting practices.

References

Aitken, Z., Hewitt, B., Keogh, L., LaMontagne, A., Bentley, R., 2016. Young maternal age at first birth and mental health later in life: Does the association vary by birth cohort? *Social Science & Medicine*. 157: 9.

Allen, R., Wiles, J., 2016. A Rose by Any Other Name: Participants Choosing Research Pseudonyms. *Qualitative Research in Psychology.* 13:2. Pages 149-165

Allmann, A., Kopala-Sibley, D., Klein, D., 2016. Preschoolers' Psychopathology and Temperament Predict Mothers' Later Mood Disorders. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology.* 44.3 (Apr 2016): 421-432

Anderson, K., George, J., Nease, J., 2002. Requirements, Risks, and Responsibility: Mothering and Fathering in Books about Raising Boys. *Analyses of Social Issues & Public Policy*. 2(1). Pages 205-221

Assarsson, L., Aarsand, P., 2011. 'How to be good': media representations of parenting. *Studies in the Education of Adults*. 43(1). Pages 78- 92.

Baker, J., Seltzer, M., Greenberg, J., 2012. Behaviour problems, maternal internalising symptoms and family relations in families of adolescents and adults with fragile X syndrome. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research.* 56.10 (October 2012): 984-995.

Baor, L., Soskolne, V., 2012. Mothers of IVF Twins: The Mediating Role of Employment and Social Coping Resources in Maternal Stress. *Women & Health.* 52.1-4 (January 2012): 252-264.

BARB, 2016. *The UK Television Landscape Report.* Quarter 4, 2016. Broadcasters' Audience Research Board.

Barker, E., Hartley, S., Seltzer, M., Floyd, F., Greenberg, J., et al., 2011. Trajectories of emotional well-being in mothers of adolescents and adults with autism. *Developmental Psychology*. 47.2 (March 2011): 551-561.

Barnett, M., Mortensen, J., Gonzalez, H., 2016. Grandmother Involvement in Mexican American Families. *Journal of Family Issues.* 37.14 (Nov 2016): 1945-1967

Bastian, A., 2011. Representations of childhood obesity in Australian newsprint media and academic literature. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health.* 35(2). Pages 135-139

Bayrampour, H., McDonald, S., Tough, S., 2015. Risk factors of transient and persistent anxiety during pregnancy. *Midwifery.* 31.6 (Jun 2015): 582-589.

BBC, 2005. Berners-Lee on the read/write web. *BBC.* Available from: https://web.archive.org/web/20120901190414/http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/4132752.stm Last accessed 01/04/2020

BBC, 2020. *Our values*. Available from: https://www.bbc.co.uk/careers/why-join-us/values. Last accessed 20/05/2020

BBC, 2020b. Coronavirus: Schools in England reopening on 1 June confirmed, PM says. *BBC News.* 24th May 2020. Available from: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-52792769 Last accessed 05/01/2021

BBC, 2020c. Coronavirus: Should I send my child back to school? *BBC News.* 20th May 2020. Available from: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-devon-52741538 Last accessed 05/01/2021

BBC, 2019. *Introduction, Section 1: The BBC's Editorial Values. Editorial Guidelines.* Available from https://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidelines/bbc-editorial-values Last accessed 25/03/2019

BBC, 2017. Writing Motherland. *BBC.* Available from: https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/writersroom/entries/99eab907-b2e9-4343-83f5-7bb5b5b6251c Last accessed 21/04/2020.

BBC, 2005. Berners-Lee on the read/write web. *BBC.* Available from: https://web.archive.org/web/20120901190414/http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/4132752.stm Last accessed 01/04/2020

Benedict, W., 2018. *Responsibility, Restoration and Fault*. Intersentia, Cambridge

Bennett, A., 2016. 23 Reminders That Representation Is Everything. *Buzzfeed.* 19/06/2016. Available from: https://www.buzzfeed.com/alannabennett/reminders-that-representation-really-is-important Last accessed 20/05/2020

Benson, P., 2012. Network Characteristics, Perceived Social Support, and Psychological Adjustment in Mothers of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders.* 42.12 (December 2012): 2597-2610.

Berry, C, 2020. If we need childcare to reopen the UK economy, why is it so undervalued? *The Guardian*. 23rd May 2020. Available from: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/may/23/childcare-reopen-economy-children-school-coronavirus

Booth, K., 2000. 'Just testing': race, sex, and the media in New York's 'Baby AIDS' debate. *Gender and Society*. 14(5). Pages 644- 661.

Bondi, L., 2009. Teaching Reflexivity: Undoing or Reinscribing Habits of Gender? *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*. 33:3. Pages 327-337

Boxer, K., 2013. *Rethinking Responsibility.* Oxford University Press, Oxford

Brabazon, T., Goldson, A., Golding, P., Williamson, M., McDougal, J., Meyers, C., 2019. Is Media Studies About to go Viral? *Times Higher Education.* 10th October 2019. Available from: https://www.timeshighereducation.com/features/media-studies-about-go-viral Last accessed 17/11/2020

Brand, V., 2009. Empirical Business Ethics Research and Paradigm Analysis. *Journal of Business Ethics* 86 (4):429–49. Cited Irshaidat, R., 2019. Interpretivism vs. Positivism in Political Marketing Research. *Journal of Political Marketing*. 0. Page 17.

Braun, V., Clarke, V., 2006. Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. 3. Pages 77-101

Braun, V., Clarke, V., Hayfield, N., 2022. 'A starting point for your journey, not a map': Nikki Hayfield in conversation with Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke about thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. 19:2, 424-445

Bristow, J., 2014. *Who Cares for Children? The Problem of Intergenerational Contact* in Lee, E., Bristow, J., Faircloth, C., Macvarish, J., *Parenting Culture Studies*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke

Bristow, J., 2013. Reporting the Riots: Parenting Culture and the Problem of Authority in Media Analysis of August 2011. *Sociological Research Online.* 18(4) 11.

British Psychological Society, 2017. *Ethics Guidelines for Internet-mediated Research*. British Psychological Society, Leicester. Available from: https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Policy/Policy%20-%20Files/Ethics%20Guidelines%20for%20Internet-mediated%20Research%20%282017%29.pdf Last accessed 19/04/2021

Bryant, C, 2006. The Language of Resistance? Czech Jokes and Joke-Telling under Nazi Occupation, 1943-45. *Journal of Contemporary History.* Vol. 41, No. 1 pages 133-151.

Buchanan, I., 2010. Winnicott, Donald Woods. *A Dictionary of Critical Theory*. Online Ed. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Buckmaster, L., 2017. The Letdown review – an affecting portrait of motherhood with spoonfuls of comedy. *The Guardian*. Available from: https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2017/oct/25/the-letdown-review-an-affecting-portrait-of-motherhood-with-spoonfuls-of-comedy Last accessed: 22/04/2020

Budds, K., Locke, A., Burr, V., 2013. Risky Business, Constructing the "choice" to "delay" motherhood in the British press. *Feminist Media Studies.* 13(1). Pages 132-147

Bundy, K., Thompson, K., Strapp, C., 1997. Parenting Behaviors: A Content Analysis of Situational Comedies Based on TV Fictional Families. *Psychological Reports.* 80. Pahes1123-1137

Burton, G., 2010. *Media and Society. Critical Perspectives.* 2nd Ed. Open University Press, Berkshire

Caldwell, C., Antonucci, T., Jackson, J., 1998. Supportive/Conflictual Family Relations and Depressive Symptomatology: Teenage Mother and Grandmother Perspectives. *Family Relations.* 47.4. Pages 395-402.

Campbell, F., Conti, G., Heckman, J., Hyeok Moon, S., Pinto, R., Pungello, E., Pan, Y., 2014. Early Childhood Investments Substantially Boost Adult Health. *Science.* 343(6178). Pages 1478-1485

Campbell, K., Levesque, S., 1998. Mandatory thinness and mother-blame: the newspaper coverage of the Marlene Corrigan trial. *Canadian Woman Studies.* 18(2-3). Pages 69-73

Cardoso, J., Padilla, Y., Sampson, M., 2010. Racial and Ethnic Variation in the Predictors of Maternal Parenting Stress. *Journal of Social Service Research.* 36.5 (October 2010): 429-444

Chavis, L., 2016. Mothering and anxiety: Social support and competence as mitigating factors for first-time mothers. *Social Work in Health Care.* 55.6 (Jul 2016): 461-480

Cheng, C., Pickler, R., 2009. Effects of stress and social support on postpartum health of Chinese mothers in the United States. *Research in Nursing and Health.* 32.6 (December 2009): 582-591

Choi, E., 2016. Marital satisfaction and maternal depressive symptoms among Korean mothers transitioning to parenthood. *Journal of Family Psychology.* 30.4 (Jun 2016): 516.

Chung, T., Lee, D., Leung, T., Yip, A., 2004. Ethnoepidemiology of postnatal depression: prospective multivariate study of sociocultural risk factors in a Chinese population in Hong Kong. *British Journal of Psychiatry.* 184 (January 2004): 34-40

Clarke, J., Mosleh, D., Janketic, N., 2016. Discourses about children's mental health and developmental disorders in North American women's magazines 1990-2012. *Child & Family Social Work*. 21. Pages 391–400

Clarke, J., 2014. Tracking governance: advice to mothers about managing the behaviour of their children in a leading Canadian women's magazine during two disease regimes. *Critical Public Health*. 24(3). Pages 253–265

Clarke, J., 2010. The Domestication of Health Care: Health Advice to Canadian Mothers 1993–2008 in Today's Parent. *Family Relations.* 59. Pages 170- 179

Clarke, V., Kitzinger, C., 2005. 'We're not Living on Planet Lesbian': Constructions of Male Role Models in Debates about Lesbian Families. *Sexualities.* 8(2). Pages 137–152

Clarke, V., 2001. What about the Children? Arguments against Lesbian and Gay Parenting. *Women's Studies International Forum.* 24(5). Pages 555–570

Clesse, C., Lighezzolo_Alnot, J., de Lavergne, S., Hamlin, S., Scheffler, M., 2018. The evolution of birth medicalisation: A systematic review. *Midwifery.* Vol. 66. Pages 161-167

Colman, A., 2009. Good Enough Mother. *A Dictionary of Psychology*. 3rd ed., online. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Connolly-Ahern, C., Broadway, C., 2008. "To Booze or Not to Booze?" Newspaper Coverage of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders. *Science Communication.* 29(3). Pages 362- 385

Couldry, N., 2020. *Media. Why it Matters*. Polity, Cambridge

Couldry, N., Hepp, A., 2017. *The Mediated Construction of Reality.* Polity, Cambridge.

Counihan, M., 1972. *Orthodoxy, Revisionism and Guerrilla Warfare in Mass Communications Research*. CCCS mimeo, University of Birmingham. Cited Morley, D., 1999. *Part II, The Nationwide Audience*, page 125, in Morley, D., Brunsdon, C., *The Nationwide Television Studies*. Pages 119-302. Routledge, London

Damato, E., Anthony, M., Maloni, J., 2009. Correlates of Negative and Positive Mood State in Mothers of Twins. *Journal of Pediatric Nursing.* 24.5 (October 2009): 369-377.

Das, R., 2020a. *COVID 19, perinatal mental health and the digital pivot.* University of Surrey. Available from: http://epubs.surrey.ac.uk/857117/ Last accessed 08/06/2020

Das, R., 2020b. COVID-19, New Motherhood and the Digital Pivot. *Discover Society.* 25th March 2020. Available from: https://discoversociety.org/2020/03/25/covid19-new-motherhood-and-the-digital-pivot/ Last accessed 17/11/2020

Das, R., 2020c. *How 2020 Mothers are Being Affected by Covid-19.* University of Surrey. 11th June 2020. Available from: https://www.surrey.ac.uk/news/how-2020-mothers-are-being-affected-covid-19 Last accessed 17/11/2020

Das, R., 2020d. *Early Motherhood in Digital Societies; Ideals, Anxieties and Ties of the Perinatal.* Routledge, London

Das, R., 2017. Audiences: A Decade of Transformations – Reflections from the CEDAR Network on Emerging Directions in Audience Analysis. *Media, Culture & Society.* Vol. 39(8) 1257–1267

Daum, M., 2016. *Selfish, Shallow and Self-Absorbed: Sixteen Writers on the Decision Not to Have Kids*. Picador

De Laat, K., Baumann, S., 2016. Caring consumption as marketing schema: representations of motherhood in an era of hyperconsumption. *Journal of Gender Studies.* 25(2,). Pages 183-199

Dennis, C., Ross, L., 2006. Women's perceptions of partner support and conflict in the development of postpartum depressive symptoms. *Journal of Advanced Nursing.* 56.6 (December 2006): 588-599.

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2012. *The 2011 Skills for Life Survey: A Survey of Literacy, Numeracy and ICT Levels in England*. BIS Research Paper 81. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2011-skills-for-life-survey Last accessed 27/10/2020

Department for Education, 2020. *Pupil absence in schools in England: 2018 to 2019.* 26th March 2020. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/875275/Absence_3term.pdf Last accessed 05/01/2021

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2018. *Disinformation and 'fake news': Interim Report Fifth Report of Session 2017–19.* House of Commons. Available from: https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcumeds/363/363.pdf Last accessed 30/10/2020

Dodge, R., Daly, A., Huyton, J., Sanders, L., 2012. The challenge of defining wellbeing. *International Journal of Wellbeing*. 2(3). Pages 222-235

Don, B., Biehle, S., Mickelson, K., 2013. Feeling like part of a team: Perceived parenting agreement among first-time parents. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships.* 30.8 (December 2013): 1121-1137

Douglas, S., Michaels, M., 2005. *The Mommy Myth. The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined All Women*. Free Press, New York.

DMG Media, 2017. *MailOnline Enters Data Deal with Netmums.* Available from: https://www.mailmetromedia.co.uk/news/mailonline-enters-data-deal-netmums/ last accessed 18/03/2020

Ekas, N., Lickenbrock, D., Whitman, T., 2010. Optimism, Social Support, and Well-Being in Mothers of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders.* 40.10 (October 2010): 1274-128.

Embury- Dennis, T., 2018. Midwives told they must respect mothers who decide not to breastfeed. *Independent*. 12th June 2018. Available from https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/breastfeeding-midwife-royal-college-advice-mothers-bottle-feeding-respect-a8395041.html Last accessed 30/10/2020

ESRC, 2015. *The Dahlgren-Whitehead Rainbow.* Economic and Social Research Council. Available from http://www.esrc.ac.uk/about-us/50-years-of-esrc/50-achievements/the-dahlgren-whitehead-rainbow/ last accessed 18/07/2017

FACT COVID, 2020. *About Families and Community in the Time of COVID-19*. Available from: https://fact-covid.wixsite.com/study Last accessed 05/01/2021

Fagan, J; Schor, D., 1993. Mothers of children with spina bifida: factors related to maternal psychosocial functioning. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry.* 63.1 (January 1993): 146-152.

Faircloth, 2020. *'Parenting the Pandemic' drawing on early findings from the Families and Community Transition Under Covid project at UCL.* Centre for Parenting Culture Studies research seminar. 9th December 2020.

Faircloth, C., 2014. *Intensive Parenting* in Lee, E., Bristow, J., Faircloth, C., Macvarish, J., *Parenting Culture Studies.* Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke

Faircloth, C., 2010a. 'What Science Says is Best': Parenting Practices, Scientific Authority and Maternal Identity. *Sociological Research Online.* Vol 15, Issue 4

Faircloth, C., 2010b. 'If they want to risk the health and well-being of their child, that's up to them': Long-term breastfeeding, risk and maternal identity. *Health, Risk and Society.* Volume 12, issue 4. Pages 357-367

Fletcher, W., 2010. *Advertising. A Very Short Introduction.* Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Fleurbaey, M., 2008. *Fairness, Responsibility, and Welfare*. Oxford University Press, Oxford

Foos, F., Bischof, D., 2020. *Tabloid media campaigns and public opinion: Quasi-experimental evidence on Euroscepticism in England.* Working paper. Available from: http://www.florianfoos.net/resources/Foos_Bischof_Sun.pdf Last accessed 23/02/21

Foster, R., Kozachek, S., Stern, M., Elsea, S., 2010. Caring for the Caregivers: An Investigation of Factors Related to Well-Being Among Parents Caring for a Child with Smith-Magenis Syndrome. *Journal of Genetic Counselling.* 19.2 (April 2010): 187-198.

Furedi, F., 2014. *Foreword* in Lee, E., Bristow, J., Faircloth, C., Macvarish, J., Eds., *Parenting Culture Studies*. Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire

Furedi, F., 2008. *Paranoid Parenting. Why Ignoring the Experts May be Best for Your Child*. 3rd Ed. Continuum, London

Furedi, F., 2008a. *Paranoid Parenting. Why Ignoring the Experts may be the Best for Your Child*. 2nd Ed. Continuum, London and New York. Cited Bristow, J., 2014. *Who Cares for Children? The Problem of Intergenerational Contact* in Lee, E., Bristow, J., Faircloth, C., Macvarish, J., *Parenting Culture Studies.* Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke. Page 102.

Furedi, F., 2008b. It is time to challenge the Supernanny State. *Spiked.* Available from: http://www.spiked-online.com/review_of_books/article/5951#.WWYyk1GQyUk Last accessed 12/07/2017

Furedi, F., 2002. *Paranoid Parenting. Why Ignoring the Experts may be the Best for Your Child*. Chicago Review Press, Chicago. Cited Lee, E., 2014. *Introduction* to Lee, E., Bristow, J., Faircloth, C., Macvarish, J., *Parenting Culture Studies.* Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke. Page 7.

Furedi, F., 2001. *Paranoid Parenting. Abandon Your Anxieties and be a Good Parent.* Allen Lane, London.

Gale, N., Heath, G., Cameron, E., Rashid, S., Redwood, S., 2013. Using the framework method for the analysis of qualitative data in multi-disciplinary health research. *BMC Medical Research Methodology.* Volume 13, article number: 117

Gallagher, J., 2020. Coronavirus: Are women and children less affected? *BBC News*. 8th March 2020. Available from: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-51774777 Last accessed 04/01/2020. Last accessed 04/01/2021

Gallegher, S., 2020. Non- Essential Shops to Reopen: What Shops Will it Include and When Will it Happen? *The Independent*. 15th June 2020. Available from: https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/non-essential-shops-open-uk-which-when-lockdown-boris-johnson-coronavirus-a9532611.html Last accessed 05/01/2021

Gjesfjeld, C., Greeno, C., Kim, K., Anderson, C., 2010. Economic Stress, Social Support, and Maternal Depression: Is Social Support Deterioration Occurring? *Social Work Research.* 34.3 (September 2010): 135-143

Giddens, A., 1991. *Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age.* Polity Press, Cambridge. Cited Seale, C., 2002. *Media and Health.* Sage, Los Angeles. Page 14.

Gillies, V., 2006. *Marginalised Mothers; Exploring Working Class Experiences of Parenting.* Routledge, London

Goldberg, W., Greenberger, E., Hamill, S., O'Neil, R., 1992. Role Demands in the Lives of Employed Single Mothers with Preschoolers. *Journal of Family Issues.* 13.3 (September 1992): 312-333.

Gomm, R., 2004. *Social Research Methodology. A Critical Introduction.* Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

Gray, K., Piccinin, A., Hofer, S., Mackinnon, A., Bontempo, D., et al., 2011. The longitudinal relationship between behavior and emotional disturbance in young people with intellectual disability and maternal mental health. *Research in Developmental Disabilities.* 32.3 (May 2011): 1194-1204

Gross, H., Pattison, H., 2001. Pregnancy and working: a critical reading of advice and information on pregnancy and employment. *Feminism and Psychology*. 11(4). Pages 511-525

Hall, S., 1997. *Representation and the Media*. Transcript. Media Education Foundation. Available from: https://www.mediaed.org/transcripts/Stuart-Hall-Representation-and-the-Media-Transcript.pdf Last accessed 16/04/2020

Hardyment, C., 2007. *Dream Babies. Childcare advice from John Locke to Gina Ford*. Frances Lincoln, London.

Hays, S., 1996. *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood.* Yale University Press, Connecticut

Hepp, A., Hasebrink, U., 2017. Researching Transforming Communications in Times of Deep Mediatization: A Figurational Approach. In A. Hepp et al. (eds.), *Communicative Figurations*, part of Transforming Communications – Studies in Cross-Media Research series. Pages 15-48.

Hiebert-Murphy, D., 2000. Factors related to mothers' perceptions of parenting following their children's disclosures of sexual abuse. *Child Maltreatment.* 5.3 (August 2000): 251-260

Hine, C., 2014. Headlice eradication as everyday engagement with science: An analysis of online parenting discussions. *Public Understanding of Science.* Vol. 23(5) 574–591

Hock, E; Lutz, W., 1992. Dimensions of family relationships associated with depressive symptomatology in mothers of young children. *Psychology of Women Quarterly.* 16.Jun 92 (June 1992): 229-241

Hoffman, D., 2009. How (not) to feel: culture and the politics of emotion in the American parenting advice literature. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education.* 30(1). Pages 15-31

Holloway, S., Suzuki, S., Yamamoto, Y., Mindnich, J., 2006. Relation of Maternal Role Concepts to Parenting, Employment Choices, and Life Satisfaction among Japanese Women. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*. 54.3-4 (February 2006): 235-249.

Holmes, E., Erickson, J., Hill, E., 2012. Doing what she thinks is best: Maternal psychological wellbeing and attaining desired work situations. *Human Relations.* 65.4 (April 2012): 501-522

Hoskins, D., 2014. Consequences of parenting on adolescent outcomes. *Societies.* 4(3). Pages 506-531.

Irwin, A., 1999. *Science and Citizenship.* In Scanlon, E., Whitelegg, E., Yates, S., (eds) *Communicating Science: Contexts and Channels*. Routledge, London and New York. Pages 14-36

Irshaidat, R., 2019. Interpretivism vs. Positivism in Political Marketing Research. *Journal of Political Marketing*. 0. Pages 1-35

Jennings, S., Khanlou, N., Su, C., 2014. Public health policy and social support for immigrant mothers raising disabled children in Canada. *Disability & Society.* 29.10 (November 26, 2014): 1645-1657

Jette, S., 2006. Fit for Two? A Critical Discourse Analysis of Oxygen Fitness Magazine. *Sociology of Sport Journal*. 23. Pages 331-351

Jhally, S., 1997. *Representation and the Media*. Transcript. Media Education Foundation. Available from: https://www.mediaed.org/transcripts/Stuart-Hall-Representation-and-the-Media-Transcript.pdf Last accessed 16/04/2020

Jiménez, T., Horowitz, A., 2013. When White Is Just Alright: How Immigrants Redefine Achievement and Reconfigure the Ethnoracial Hierarchy. *American Sociological Review.* 78(5). Pages 849 –871

Johanson, R., Newbury, M., MacFarlane, A., 2002. Has the medicalisation of childbirth gone too far? *BMJ.* 2002; 324. Page 892

Jones, E., 2019. Sharon Horgan on mean mums and Motherland. *The Guardian.* Available from: https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2019/oct/12/sharon-horgan-on-mean-mums-and-motherland-season-two Last accessed 22/04/2020

Jordan, A., 1995. The Portrayal of Children on Prime-Time Situation Comedies. *Journal of Popular Culture*. 29 (3). Pages 139-147

Kalin, S., Fung, T., 2013. Comparison of Child Obesity Prevention and Control Content in Mainstream and Spanish-Language US Parenting Magazines. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics.* 113(1). Pages 133- 140

Kamp Dush, C., 2013. Marital and Cohabitation Dissolution and Parental Depressive Symptoms in Fragile Families. *Journal of Marriage and Family.* 75.1 (February 2013): 91-109

Kearns, R., Neuwelt, P., Hitchman, B., Lennan, M., 1997. Social support and psychological distress before and after childbirth. *Health and Social Care in the Community.* 5.5 (September 1997): 296-308.

Kehily, M., J., 2010. Childhood in crisis? Tracing the contours of 'crisis' and its impact upon contemporary parenting practices. *Media, Culture & Society.* 32(2). Pages 171–185

Kendrick, R., 2008. 'We Can Change the Face of this Future': Television Transforming the Fat Child. *Australian Feminist Studies.* 23(57). Pages 389-400

Kestler-Peleg, M., Shamir-Dardikman, M., Hermoni, D., Ginzburg, K., 2015. Breastfeeding motivation and Self-Determination Theory. *Social Science & Medicine.* 144 (Nov 2015): 19.

Khoros, 2020. *The 2020 Social Media Demographics Guide.* Available from: https://khoros.com/resources/social-media-demographics-guide Last accessed 01/04/2020

Kiehl, E., White, M., 2003. Maternal adaptation during childbearing in Norway, Sweden and the United States. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences.* 17.2 (June 2003): 96-103

Kitzinger, J., 1999. *A Sociology of Media Power: Key Issues in Audience Reception Work* in Philo, G., eds *Message Received*. Longman, Essex. Pages 2-20

Kitzinger, J., Miller, D., 1998. *Introduction* in Miller, D., Kitzinger, J., Williams, K., Beharrell, P., (eds). *The Circuit of Mass Communication.* Sage, London, pages 1-12.

Koeske, G., Koeske, R., 1990. The buffering effect of social support on parental stress. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. 60.Jul 90 (July 1990): 440-451

Koropeckyj-Cox, T., Pienta, A., Brown, T., 2007. Women of the 1950s and the 'Normative' Life Course: The Implications of Childlessness, Fertility Timing, and Martial Status for Psychological Well-Being in Late Midlife. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development.* 64.4 (0, 2007): 299-330.

Kuhn-Wilken, E., Zimmerman, T., Matheson, J., Banning, J., Pepin, J., 2012. Supernanny's Solutions for Families: An Ethnographic Content Analysis of Parenting Messages on Reality Television. *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy.* 24. Pages 316–339

Laghi, F., Baumgartner, E., Riccio, G., Bohr, Y., Dhayanandhan, B., 2013. The Role of Romantic Involvement and Social Support in Italian Adolescent Mothers' Lives. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*. 22.8 (November 2013): 1074-1081

Lahman, M., Rodriquez, K., Moses, L., Griffin, K., Mendoza, B., Yacoub, W., 2015. A Rose By Any Other Name Is Still a Rose? Problematizing Pseudonyms in Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*. Vol. 21(5). Pages 445–453

Langlais, M., Anderson, E., Greene, S., 2016. Consequences of Dating for Post-divorce Maternal Well-being. *Journal of Marriage and Family.* 78.4 (Aug 2016): 1032-1046.

Lareau, A., 2002. Invisible Inequality: Social Class and Childrearing in Black Families and White Families. *American Sociological Review*. Vol. 67, No. 5. Pages 747-776

Lawson, K., 2018. Why Seeing Yourself Represented on Screen Is So Important. *Vice.* 20/02/2018. Available from: https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/zmwq3x/why-diversity-on-screen-is-important-black-panther Last accessed 20/05/2020

Leadsom, A., 2021. *Chairman's Introduction*, in *The Best Start for Life. A Vision for the 1,001 Critical Days. The Early Years Healthy Development Review Report*. H M Government

Lee, E., 2014a. *Introduction* in Lee, E., Bristow, J., Faircloth, C., Macvarish, J., *Parenting Culture Studies*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

Lee, E., 2014b. *Experts and Parenting Culture* in Lee, E., Bristow, J., Faircloth, C., Macvarish, J., *Parenting Culture Studies.* Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

Lee, J., 2013. Maternal stress, well-being, and impaired sleep in mothers of children with developmental disabilities: A literature review. *Research in Developmental Disabilities.* 34.11 (November 2013): 4255-4273

Lee, Y., 2018. *The Father's Digital Pushchair: Three Taiwanese Father Bloggers.* Seminar delivered at Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, University of Edinburgh. 1st May, 2018.

Levendosky, A., Graham-Bermann, S., 2001. Parenting in Battered Women: The Effects of Domestic Violence on Women and Their Children. *Journal of Family Violence.* 16.2 (June 2001): 171-192.

Lightfoot, L., 2020. 'It can be life or death': the parents in England refusing to send their children back to school. *The Guardian.* 9th October 2020. Available from: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/oct/09/parents-in-england-refusing-to-send-their-children-back-to-school Last accessed 05/01/2020

Limerick, B., Burgess- Limerick, T., Grace, M., 1996. The Politics of Interviewing: Power Relations and Accepting the Gift. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. 9(4). Pages 449-460. Cited Oakley, A., 2016. Interviewing Women Again: Power, Time and the Gift. *Sociology*. Vol. 50(1). Page 208

Lindsay, R., Harrison, C., Dickinson, J., 1999. Psychosocial factors that affect adolescent mothering. *Australian Social Work.* 52.1 (March 1999): 32-38.

Liss., M., Schiffrin, H., Mackintosh, V., Miles-McLean, H., Erchull, 2012. Development and Validation of a Quantitative Measure of Intensive Parenting Attitudes. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*. 22.5 (Jun 2012): 621–636

Lloyd, T., Hastings, R., 2009. Hope as a psychological resilience factor in mothers and fathers of children with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research.* 53.12 (December 2009): 957-968

Locke, A., 2015. Agency, 'good motherhood' and 'a load of mush': Constructions of baby-led weaning in the press. *Women's Studies International Forum.* 53. Pages 139–146

Lowe, P., Lee, E., Yardley, L., 2010. Under the Influence? The Construction of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome in UK Newspapers. *Sociological Research Online.* 15(4) 2

LSE, undated. *Digital Communications. Social Media Platforms and Demographics*. London School of Economics and Political Science. Available from: https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/communications-division/digital-communications-team/assets/documents/guides/A-Guide-To-Social-Media-Platforms-and-Demographics.pdf last accessed 01/04/2020

Lucas, J., 1995. *Responsibility*. Oxford University Press, Oxford

Luoma, I., Korhonen, M., Salmelin, R., Helminen, M., Tamminen, T., 2015. Long-term trajectories of maternal depressive symptoms and their antenatal predictors. *Journal of Affective Disorders.* 170 (Jan 2015): 30-38

Lynn, F., Alderdice, F., Crealey, G., McElnay, J., 2011. Associations between maternal characteristics and pregnancy-related stress among low-risk mothers: An observational cross-sectional study. *International Journal of Nursing Studies.* 48.5 (May 2011): 620-627

Mackenzie, J., 2017. 'Can we have a child exchange?' Constructing and Subverting the 'Good Mother' Through Play in Mumsnet Talk. *Discourse & Society*. 28(3). Pages 296–312

Macvarish, J., 2014a. *Babies' Brains and Parenting Policy: The Insensitive Mother* in Lee, E., Bristow, J., Faircloth, C., Macvarish, J., *Parenting Culture Studies.* Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke

Macvarish, J., 2014b. *The Politics of Parenting* in Lee, E., Bristow, J., Faircloth, C., Macvarish, J., *Parenting Culture Studies.* Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke

Madden, V., Domoney, J., Aumayer, K., Sethna, V., Iles, J., Hubbard, I., Giannakakis, A., Psychogiou, L., Ramchandani, P., 2015. Intergenerational transmission of parenting: findings from a UK longitudinal study. *Eur J Public Health.* Vol. 25 No. 6. Pages 1030-5.

Maehara, K., Mori, E., Tsuchiya, M., Iwata, H., Sakajo, A.,et al., 2016. Factors affecting maternal confidence and satisfaction in older Japanese primiparae during postpartum hospital stay. *International Journal of Nursing Practice.* 22.S1 (Apr 2016): 14-21

Mainland, M., Shaw, S., Prier, A., 2015. Fearing Fat: Exploring the Discursive Links between Childhood Obesity, Parenting, and Leisure. *Journal of Leisure Research.* 47(2). Pages 202-219

Manuel, J., Martinson, M., Bledsoe-Mansori, S., Bellamy, J., 2012. The influence of stress and social support on depressive symptoms in mothers with young children. *Social Science & Medicine.* 75.11 (December 2012): 2013-2020.

Martini, J., Petzoldt, J., Einsle, F., Beesdo-Baum, K., Höfler, M., et al., 2015. Risk factors and course patterns of anxiety and depressive disorders during pregnancy and after delivery: A prospective-longitudinal study. *Journal of Affective Disorders.* 175 (Apr 2015): 385-395

McKenna, M., 2012. *Conversation and Responsibility*. Oxford University Press, Oxford

McKinley, C., Mastro, D., Warber, K., 2014. Social Identity Theory as a Framework for Understanding the Effects of Exposure to Positive Media Images of Self and Other on Intergroup Outcomes. *International Journal of Communication.* 8. Pages 1049–1068

McMahon, C., Boivin, J., Gibson, F., Hammarberg, K., Wynter, K., et al., 2015. Older maternal age and major depressive episodes in the first two years after birth: Findings from the Parental Age and Transition to Parenthood Australia (PATPA) study. *Journal of Affective Disorders.* 175 (Apr 2015): 454-462.

McNeil, T., Kaij, L., Malmquist-Larsson, A., 1984. Women with Nonorganic Psychosis: Factors Associated with Pregnancy's Effect on Mental Health. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*. 70.3 (September 1984): 209-219

Meier, A., Musick, K., Flood, S., Dunifon, R., 2016. Mothering Experiences: How Single Parenthood and Employment Structure the Emotional Valence of Parenting. *Demography.* 53.3 (Jun 2016): 649-674.

Mellon, J., Prosser, C., 2017. Twitter and Facebook are not representative of the general population: Political attitudes and demographics of British social media users. *Research and Politics*. July-September 2017. Pages 1 –9

Milkie, M., 1999. Social Comparisons, Reflected Appraisals, and Mass Media: The Impact of Pervasive Beauty Images on Black and White Girls' Self Concepts. *Social Psychology Quarterly.* 62(2). Pages 190-2010.

Miller, S., Hefner, K., Leon, C., 2014. Diffusing responsibility: A case study of child sexual abuse in popular discourse. *Children and Youth Services Review.* 37. Pages 55–63

Molina, K., Kiely, M., 2011. Understanding Depressive Symptoms among High-Risk, Pregnant, African-American Women. *Women's Health Issues.* 21.4 (July 2011): 293-303

Moran, J., 2013. *Armchair Nation: An Intimate History of Britain in Front of the TV*. Profile Books, London

Morley, D., 1999. *Part II, The Nationwide Audience*, in Morley, D., Brunsdon, C., *The Nationwide Television Studies*. Pages 119-302. Routledge, London

Napier, D., Ancarno, C., Butler, B., et al.,2014. Culture and health. *Lancet.* 384: 1607–1639

National Literacy Trust, 2018. *Fake News and Critical Literacy. The final report of the Commission on Fake News and the Teaching of Critical Literacy in Schools.* Available from: https://cdn.literacytrust.org.uk/media/documents/Fake_news_and_critical_literacy_-_final_report.pdf 30/10/2020

National Literacy Trust, 2017. *What do adult literacy levels mean?* Available from: https://literacytrust.org.uk/parents-and-families/adult-literacy/what-do-adult-literacy-levels-mean/ Last accessed 26/10/2020

Netflix, undated. *The Letdown.* Available from: https://www.netflix.com/gb/title/80198635 Last accessed 21/04/2020

Ngai, F., Chan, S., 2011. Psychosocial factors and maternal wellbeing: An exploratory path analysis. *International Journal of Nursing Studies.* 48.6 (June 2011): 725-731

NHS, 2017. *Benefits of breastfeeding*. NHS. Available from: https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/benefits-breastfeeding/ Last accessed 24/02/2020

NHS, 2018. *Overview. Postnatal Depression.* NHS. Available from: https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/post-natal-depression/ Last accessed 29/05/2020

Nijjar, J., 2015. 'Menacing Youth' and 'Broken Families': A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Reporting of the 2011 English Riots in the Daily Express Using Moral Panic Theory. *Sociological Research Online*. 20(4), 10

Nores, M., Barnett, S., 2010. Benefits of early childhood interventions across the world: (Under) Investing in the very young. *Economics of Education Review.* 29(2). Pages 271-282

Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2019. *Standards of Proficiency for Midwives.* Nursing and Midwifery Council, London. Available from: https://www.nmc.org.uk/globalassets/sitedocuments/standards/standards-of-proficiency-for-midwives.pdf Last accessed 03/11/2020

Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2009. *Standards for Pre-Registration Midwifery Education*. Nursing and Midwifery Council, London. Available from: https://www.nmc.org.uk/globalassets/sitedocuments/standards/nmc-standards-for-preregistration-midwifery-education.pdf Last accessed 03/11/2020

Oakley, A., 2016. Interviewing Women Again: Power, Time and the Gift. *Sociology.* Vol. 50(1). Pages 195–213

O'Connor, C., Joffe, H., 2013. Media representations of early human development: protecting, feeding and loving the developing brain. *Social Science and Medicine.* 97. Pages 297-306

Ofcom, 2020a. *Media Nations 2020. Scotland Report.* 5th August 2020. Ofcom. Available from: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/200502/media-nations-2020-scotland-report.pdf Last accessed 16/11/2020

Ofcom, 2020b. *Media Nations, 2020. Interactive Report.* 5th August 2020. Ofcom. Available from https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/tv-radio-and-on-demand/media-nations-reports/media-nations-2020/interactive-report Last accessed 16/11/2020

Ofcom, 2020c. *UK's internet Use Surges to Record Levels.* 24th June 2020. Ofcom. Available from: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/media/media-releases/2020/uk-internet-use-surges Last accessed 16/11/2020

Ofcom, 2018. *News Consumption in the UK: 2018*. Ofcom. Available from: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0024/116529/news-consumption-2018.pdf Last accessed 29/04/2021

Ofcom, 2015. *Adults' media use and attitudes. Report 2015*. Ofcom. Available from https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/82112/2015_adults_media_use_and_attitudes_report.pdf last accessed 26/06/2017

Office of National Statistics, 2019. *Measures of National Well-being Dashboard.* ONS. Available from: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/measuresofnationalwellbeingdashboard/2018-04-25 Last accessed 22/05/2020

Office of National Statistics, 2020. *Annual personal well-being estimates. October 2018 to September 2019*. ONS. Available from: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/headlineestimatesofpersonalwellbeing Last accessed 22/05/2020

Office of National Statistics, 2020b. *Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain: 23 April 2020*. ONS. Available from: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain/23april2020 Last accessed 04/01/2020

Orghad, S., 2020. *Foreword* in Das, R., 2020. *Early Motherhood in Digital Societies. Ideals, Anxieties and Ties of the Perinatal*. Routledge, Oxford.

Osborne, C., Berger, L., Magnuson, K., 2012. Family Structure Transitions and Changes in Maternal Resources and Well-being. *Demography.* 49.1 (February 2012): 23-47.

Pedersen, S., 2016. The good, the bad and the 'good enough' mother on the UK parenting forum Mumsnet. *Women's Studies International Forum.* Volume 59. Pages 32-38

Pedersen, S., Smithson, J., 2013. Mothers with Attitude - How the Mumsnet Parenting Forum Offers Space for New Forms of Femininity to Emerge Online. *Women's Studies International Forum*. 38. Pages 97- 106.

Petley, J., 2012. “Are We Insane?”. The “Video Nasty” Moral Panic. *Recherches Sociologiques et Anthropologiques.* 43-1. Pages 35-57.

Petley, J., 1994. In Defence of ‘Video Nasties’. *British Journalism Review*. Volume 5, Issue 3. Pages 52-57

Phoenix, A., 1994. *Practising feminist research: The intersections of gender and ‘race’ in the research process*. In: Maynard M and Purvis J (eds) *Researching Women’s Lives from a Feminist Perspective*. London: Taylor and Francis. Cited Oakley, A., 2016. Interviewing Women Again: Power, Time and the Gift. *Sociology.* Vol. 50(1). Page 197.

Ponsford, D., 2019. Pamco figures show 25m reading a UK newspaper (or its website) every day. *Press Gazette*. Available from: https://www.pressgazette.co.uk/uk-newspaper-and-website-readership-2018-pamco/ Last accessed 01/04/2020

Press Association, 2018. Breastfeeding: woman’s choice must be respected, midwives told. *The Guardian*. 12th June 2018. Available from: https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/jun/12/breastfeeding-womans-choice-must-be-respected-midwives-told Last accessed 30/10/2020

Quirke, L., 2014. *How You Should Spend Your Summer Vacation: Parenting Advice Regarding Children's Time in Summer, 1985-2013*. Conference Papers - American Sociological Association

Radiotimes, 2015. Orange is the New Black’s wonder woman Laverne Cox on being a transgender trailblazer. *Radiotimes.* 26/07/2015. Available from: https://www.radiotimes.com/news/2015-07-26/orange-is-the-new-blacks-wonder-woman-laverne-cox-on-being-a-transgender-trailblazer/2/ Last accessed 20/05/2020

Reese, E., Newcombe, R., 2007. Training Mothers in Elaborative Reminiscing Enhances Children’s Autobiographical Memory and Narrative. *Child Development.* Vol.78, Iss. 4. Pages 1153-1170

Rini, C., DuHamel, K., Ostroff, J., Boulad, F., Martini, R., et al., 2008. Social Support From Family and Friends as a Buffer of Low Spousal Support Among Mothers of Critically Ill Children: A Multilevel Modeling Approach. *Health Psychology.* 27.5 (September 2008): 593-603

Rizzo, K., Schiffrin, H., Liss, M., 2013. Insight into the Parenthood Paradox: Mental Health Outcomes of Intensive Mothering. *Journal of Child and Family Studies.* 22.5 (July 2013): 614-620.

Robson, K., 2005. "Canada's Most Notorious Bad Mother": The Newspaper Coverage of the Jordan Heikamp Inquest. *Canadian Review of Sociology & Anthropology*. 42(2). Pages 217- 232

Rogers, R., 2013. *Digital Methods*. MIT Press, Michigan

Romagnoli, A., Wall, G., 2012. ‘I know I’m a good mom’: Young, low-income mothers’ experiences with risk perception, intensive parenting ideology and parenting education programmes. *Health, Risk & Society*. Vol. 14, No. 3. 273–289

Royal College of Midwives, 2018. *Position Statement: Infant Feeding.* Royal College of Midwives, London. Available from: https://www.rcm.org.uk/media/2289/infant-feeding.pdf Last accessed 03/11/2020

Rutherford, M., 2009. Children's Autonomy and Responsibility: An Analysis of Childrearing Advice. *Qualitative Sociology.* 32. Pages 337–353

Ryan, L., 2020. 'Led by the science': the changing role of experts from Brexit to Covid 19. *BSA Everyday Society*. 8th June 2020. Available from: https://es.britsoc.co.uk/led-by-the-science-the-changing-role-of-experts-from-brexit-to-covid19/ Last accessed 11/11/2020

Salter, L., Weltman, D., 2011. Class, nationalism and news: The BBC's reporting of Hugo Chavez and the Bolivarian revolution. *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics*. 7(3). Pages 253-273

Scott, J., 2015. Norm (social norm, normative). *A Dictionary of Sociology* (4 ed.). Online edition. Oxford University Press, Oxford

Scottish Government, 2010a. *Scottish Survey of Adult Literacies 2009: Report of Findings.* Scottish Government Social Research. Available from: https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20170106134454/http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2010/07/22091814/15 Last accessed 30/10/2020

Scottish Government, 2010b. *Adult Literacies in Scotland 2020: Strategic Guidance.* Available from: https://www.gov.scot/publications/adult-literacies-scotland-2020-strategic-guidance/pages/1/ Last accessed 30/10/2020

Seale, C., Charteris-Black, J., MacFarlane, A., McPherson, A., 2010. Interviews and Internet Forums: A Comparison of Two Sources of Qualitative Data. *Qualitative Health Research*. 20(5). Pages 595–606

Seale, C., 2003. Health and Media: An Overview. *Sociology of Health and Illness*. 25(6). Pages 513-31

Seguin, L., Potvin, L., St-Denis, M., Loiselle, J., 1999. Socio-Environmental Factors and Postnatal Depressive Symptomatology: A Longitudinal Study. *Women and Health.* 29.1 (0, 1999): 57-72

Shanahan, J., 2021. *Media Effects.* Polity, Cambridge

Sherwood, H., 2019. UK Secularism on Rise as More Than Half Say They Have No Religion. *The Guardian.* 11th July 2019. Available from: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/11/uk-secularism-on-rise-as-more-than-half-say-they-have-no-religion last accessed 23/01/2020

Sheppard, M., 1997. Depression in female health visitor consulters: social and demographic facets. *Journal of Advanced Nursing.* 26.5 (November 1997): 921-929

Shivers, C., Leonczyk, C., Dykens, E., 2016. Life Satisfaction Among Mothers of Individuals with Prader-Willi Syndrome. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders.* 46.6 (Jun 2016): 2126-2137

Shum, A., Pearcey, S., Waite, P., Cresswell, C., 2020. *Supplementary Report 05: Parents/carers report on their own and their children's concerns about children attending*

school. Co-Space. Available from: https://cospaceoxford.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Co-SPACE-supp-report05_School-concerns.pdf Last accessed 05/01/2020

Sleight, C., 2020. Tens of thousands of Scottish pupils absent from school. *BBC News.* 1st September 2020. Available from: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-53983392 Last accessed 05/01/2021

Small, R., Lumley, J., Yelland, J., 2003. Cross-cultural experiences of maternal depression: associations and contributing factors for Vietnamese, Turkish and Filipino immigrant women in Victoria, Australia. *Ethnicity & Health.* 8.3 (August 2003): 189-206

Smith, C., Van Loon, P., DeFrates-Densch, N., Schrader, T., 1998. Content Changes in Parent Education Books for Parents of Adolescents. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal.* 27(2). Pages 194- 213

Smith, L., Greenberg, J., Seltzer, M., 2012. Social Support and Well-being at Mid-Life Among Mothers of Adolescents and Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders.* 42.9 (September 2012): 1818-1826.

Smith, M., 2017. *How left or right-wing are the UK's newspapers?* YouGov. Available from: https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2017/03/07/how-left-or-right-wing-are-uks-newspapers Last accessed 01/04/2020

Snow, D., Anderson, L., 1987. Identity Work Among the Homeless: The Verbal Construction and Avowal of Personal Identities. *American Journal of Sociology*. Vol. 92, No. 6. Pages 1336-1371

Spears, R., 2011. *Group Identities: The Social Identity Perspective*. In Schwartz, S., Luyckx, K., Vignoles, V., (eds) *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research*. E-book. Springer-Verlag, New York. Pages 201-224

Spinelli, M., Poehlmann, J., Bolt, D., 2013. Predictors of parenting stress trajectories in premature infant-mother dyads. *Journal of Family Psychology.* 27.6 (December 2013): 873-883.

Stevenson-Hinde, J., Curley, J., Chicot, R., Johannsson, C., 2007. Anxiety Within Families: Interrelations, Consistency, and Change. *Family Process.* 46.4 (0, 2007): 543-556.

Stoneman, Z., 2007. Examining the Down syndrome advantage: mothers and fathers of young children with disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research.* 51.12 (0, 2007): 1006-1017

Suranyi-Unger, T.,1981. Consumer behavior and consumer well-being: An economist's digest. *Journal of Consumer Research.* 8 (Sept). Pages 132-143. Cited Paim, L., 1995. Definitions and Measurements of Well-Being: A Review of Literature. *Journal of Economic and Social Measurement*. Volume 21, Issue 4. Page 297

Tally, M., 2008. *Reality Television and Contemporary Family Life: Make Over Television and the Question of Parenting.* Conference Paper- American Sociological Association

Taussig, K., Hoeyer, K., Helmreich, S., 2013. The Anthropology of Potentiality in Biomedicine: An Introduction to Supplement 7. *Current Anthropology.* 54. Supplement 7. Pages S3-S14.

Taylor, L., Merrilees, C., Cairns, E., Shirlow, P., Goeke-Morey, M., 2013. Risk and resilience: The moderating role of social coping for maternal mental health in a setting of political conflict. *International Journal of Psychology.* 48.4 (August 2013): 591-603

Taylor, R., Roberts, D., 1995. Kinship support and maternal and adolescent well-being in economically disadvantaged African-American families. *Child Development.* 66.6 (December 1995): 1585-1597

Thompson, S; Peebles-Wilkins, W., 1992. The Impact of Formal, Informal, and Societal Support Networks on the Psychological Well-Being of Black Adolescent Mothers. *Social Work.* 37.4 (July 1992): 322-328

Thorp, S., Krause, E., Cukrowicz, K., Lynch, T., 2004. Postpartum Partner Support, Demand-Withdraw Communication, and Maternal Stress. *Psychology of Women Quarterly.* 28.4 (December 2004): 362-369

Thorsen, E., 2010. *BBC News Online: A Brief History of Past and Present in Web History* Eds. Bruger, N. Peter Lang, New York.

Tobing, L., Glenwick, D., 2007. Predictors and Moderators of Psychological Distress in Mothers of Children with Pervasive Developmental Disorders. *Journal of Family Social Work.* 10.4 (July 26, 2007): 1-22.

Trudge, J., 2013. Urie Bronfenbrenner. *Oxford Bibliographies.* Online resource. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Tsao, Y., Creedy, D., Gamble, J., 2015. Emotional well-being of Vietnamese immigrant women during the transition to motherhood: A descriptive cohort study. *Nursing & Health Sciences, suppl. Women's Health* (pages 1–111). 17.1 (Feb 2015): 49-56

Turner, C., Kirk, A., 2018. Decline of 'Mickey Mouse' GCSEs Revealed as Entries for Media Studies and Home Economics Plummet. *The Telegraph*. 1st August 2018

Twitter, 2020. Tweets by @PaulBrandITV @JenWilliamsMEN @ayeshahazarika 13th March 2020. *Twitter.* Available from: https://twitter.com/ayeshahazarika/status/1238460692614844416?lang=en Last accessed 12/11/2020

UK Government 2021. *Exceptions to Copyright.* Available from: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/exceptions-to-copyright Last accessed 19/04/2021

UK Government, 2020. *Attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak*. Week 50, 15th December 2020. Available from: https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/attendance-in-education-and-early-years-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak Last accessed 05/01/2021

University of Glasgow, 2018. *Code of Good Practice in Research.* Available from: https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_490311_smxx.pdf Last accessed 13/05/2021

Vanclay, F., Baines, J., Taylor, C.N., 2013. Principles for ethical research involving humans: ethical professional practice in impact assessment Part I. *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*. 31:4. Pages 243-253,

Wahn, E., Nissen, E., 2008. Sociodemographic background, lifestyle and psychosocial conditions of Swedish teenage mothers and their perception of health and social support during pregnancy and childbirth. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health.* 36.4 (June 2008): 415-423

Wall, G., 2013. 'Putting family first': Shifting discourses of motherhood and childhood in representations of mothers' employment and child care. *Women's Studies International Forum.* 40. Pages 162–171

Wall, G., Arnold, S., 2007. How Involved Is Involved Fathering? *Gender & Society.* 21(4). Pages 508-527

Warner, L., 2009. *The Who and What of Parenting in Popular Magazines*. Conference Papers -- American Sociological Association, annual meeting.

Watts, J., 2007. Can't Take a Joke? Humour as Resistance, Refuge and Exclusion in a Highly Gendered Workplace. *Feminism & Psychology.* Vol. 17(2): 259–266.

Weale, S, 2020. Parents worried about Covid forced to home-educate or face fines. *The Guardian.* 20th November 2020. Available from: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/nov/20/parents-worried-about-covid-forced-to-home-educate-or-face-fines Last accessed 05/01/2021

White, N., 2010. Representations of Parental Responsibility in the Media. *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*. 17.1. Pages 139-147

Wolf, J., 2013. The Politics of Dissent. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*. 24(4). Pages 306-316.

Wolf, J., 2011. *Is Breast Best? Taking on the Breastfeeding Experts and the New High Stakes of Motherhood.* New York University Press, New York.

Woodman, A C; Hauser-Cram, P., 2013. The role of coping strategies in predicting change in parenting efficacy and depressive symptoms among mothers of adolescents with developmental disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research.* 57.6 (June 2013): 513-530.

World Bank, 2017. *World Bank Country and Lending Groups.* Available from: https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups Last accessed 16/05/2017

Yeoman, F., Morris, K., 2020. Why media education in schools needs to be about much more than 'fake news'. *The Conversation.* 7th January 2020. Available from: https://theconversation.com/why-media-education-in-schools-needs-to-be-about-much-more-than-fake-news-129156 Last accessed 30/10/2020

Zivkovic, T., Warin, M., Davies, M., Moore, V., 2010. In the name of the child. *Journal of Sociology*. 46(4). Pages 375-392

Appendix A- Coding Framework

Understandings of parental determinism	Causality and parental action (including rationale)	
	Adult authority	
	Child self-actualisation	
	Conceptualisations of childhood	
	Parenting is difficult	
	Changing times/ context	
	Class	
	Future reckoning/ forgiveness	
	Good enough parent	
	Individualisation	
	Others have different understanding of PD	
	Choice	
	Intensive motherhood	
	Experiences of being parented	
	Parenting skills	
	What makes a good or bad mum	
	Benefits of parental determinism	
	Endorsement of PD	
	Responsibility	
	Blame	
	Aspirations for child	
	Selfish or Sacrifice	
	Risk to children	
	Risk to society	
	Evaluation of risk	
	Surveillance and punishment for poor parenting	
Key influences on parenting	Experts	Medical authority
		Medical research
		Parent training
		Other experts
		Expert parent
		Government
	Social	Family
		Friend
		Partner
		Hearing stories
		Cultural norms
		Political
		Reference to religion
	Own experience	Of being a parent

		Of being parented/ own childhood
		Job
		Education
		Instincts
	Media	Celebrity
		Asking for advice of forum/ other online
		Reading up or doing research
Media exposure	Which media channels?	
	How are they exposed to them?	
	Media choice and identity relationship	
Perceptions of media representations	In general	Scaremongering
		Inaccurate
		Exaggerated
		Trustworthy
		Representative of society
		Biased
		Bad news/ sad/ scary
		Media as trash
		Social media as selective
		Difference between online and RL
		Deliberately untrue
	About parenting	Scaremongering
		Competitiveness
		Social media not accurate
		News of government policy
		Blame
		Information source
		Untrue/ exaggerated
		Shows bad parenting
		Perfectionist/ unrealistic/ only happy
		Celebrity mothers
		Untrustworthy
		Related to parental determism
		Framing of motherhood
		Social media posts about children
		Toxic
		Accurate/ reflecting society
		Adverts/ consumerism
Media Impact	Impact of media on own behaviour	
	Impact of media on own identities	
	Impact of media on wellbeing	
	Impacts others, not themselves	
	Critique of media impact	

	Significance/ power of media generally
	Audience influence on producers
Impact of parenting behaviours and identities on wellbeing	Autonomy
	Being judged
	Breastfeeding
	Child characteristics
	Distress
	Employment
	Endorsement of PD
	Fear
	Feeling bullied
	Frustration
	Guilt or potential guilt
	Mental health
	Sleep or tiredness
	Worry
	Positive impact
	People being accepting
	Impact on other mothers/parents/ people
	Mothers as vulnerable
	Mums 4 mums
	Relationship btwn identities and behaviours

Appendix B- Consent Form

University of Glasgow

College of Social Sciences

Research

Consent Form (Interviews)

How parenting is represented in the media and how mothers feel about that

Researcher: Hilllary (Kate) Collins, University of Glasgow.
Supervisors: Professor Daniel Wight and Dr Shona Hilton.

I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study (Interview participant information sheet V5) and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I consent / do not consent (delete as applicable) to taking part in an interview which will be being audio-recorded.

- I acknowledge that participants will be referred to, in written up work, by pseudonyms.
- All names and other material likely to identify individuals (and their children) will be anonymised.
- The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.
- The material will be retained in secure storage for use in future academic research.
- The material may be used in future publications, both print and online.
- I agree to waive my copyright to any data collected as part of this project.
- I understand that other authenticated researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.
- I understand that other authenticated researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form
- I acknowledge that there will be no effect on my membership of the parenting group I attend arising from my participation or non-participation in this research.

I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to take part in the above study.

Name .....

Signature .....

Date .....

Appendix C- Participant Information Sheet

University of Glasgow

College of Social Sciences

Research

Participant Information Sheet

How parenting is represented in the media and how mothers feel about that

Researcher: Hilllary (Kate) Collins, University of Glasgow

I am inviting you to take part in a study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why I am doing the research and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if anything is unclear or if you need more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the research about?

1. To understand mothers' views about how parents are presented in the media.
2. To understand how this affects the way mothers see themselves, their behaviour or their wellbeing.

What does it involve? Me interviewing you for up to one hour on these topics. The interview can take place where you choose- perhaps your home, a local café, my office or by telephone.

Do I have to take part? No. It is completely up to you whether you want to take part in an interview. You can withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. You can also withdraw any information you have already provided, unless it has already been written up (from Summer 2018).

Will the interviews be confidential? Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed with any names of people or places removed, so it should not be possible to identify you or your children from the written up interviews. Interviews will be as confidential as possible. In the unlikely event that I hear anything which makes me worried that someone is in serious danger, I might have to inform relevant agencies of this. If this was the case, I would discuss it with you before I did anything.

What will happen to the information from the interviews? The information will be used in my PhD thesis and may be used in conference presentations and published in articles, but only in anonymised form. After the project is over the interviews will be made available to other researchers to use, but only once all identifying information is removed.

Who is funding this research? The Medical Research Council via a PhD studentship at the MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow.

Where can I get more information about the research? Please talk to myself, the researcher Hilllary (Kate) Collins, in the first instance (h.collins.1@research.gla.ac.uk, 0141 353 7500). The research has been considered and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the College of Social Sciences, University of Glasgow. Any complaints should be forwarded to the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston (Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk).